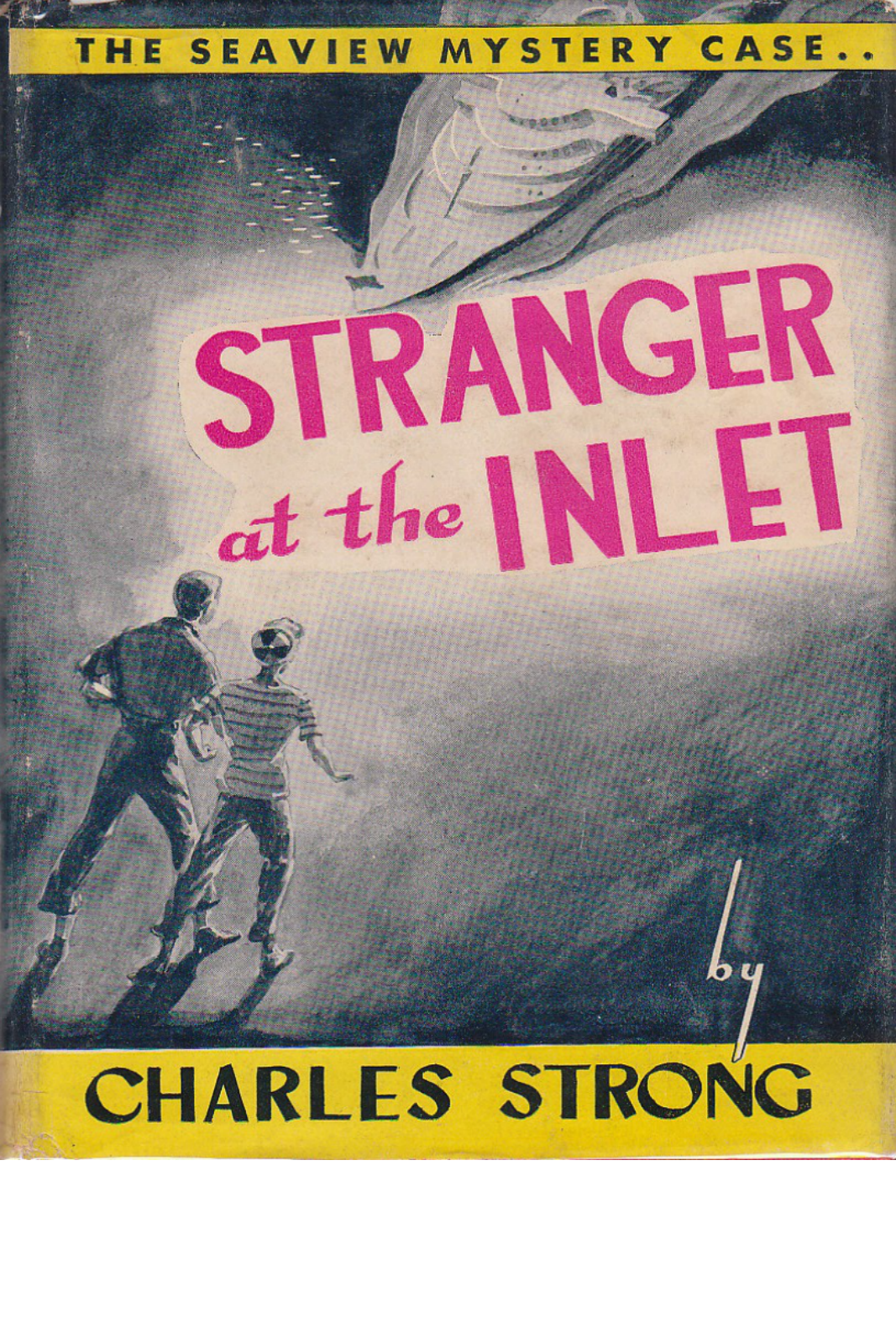


THE SEAVIEW MYSTERY CASE..

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration. In the upper right, a large, light-colored building with multiple levels and a curved facade sits atop a hill. A path or road leads down from the building towards the water. In the lower left, two figures are walking away from the viewer towards the right. The figure on the left is taller, wearing a dark jacket and trousers. The figure on the right is shorter, wearing a horizontally striped shirt and dark trousers. They are walking on a dark, reflective surface, possibly water or a wet path. The overall mood is mysterious and suspenseful.

STRANGER *at the* INLET

by

CHARLES STRONG

STRANGER AT THE INLET

By Martin Colt

ROGER BAXTER Mystery no. 1

ILLUSTRATIONS

Roger didn't notice the signals

"I told you to stay off my island!"

In a moment his expression changed

A sharp sound outside attracted their attention

Just in time to see a hand snatch the roll

Carefully he adjusted the sights

"Calling one-two-four!"

It blinked three times in rapid succession

Transferred himself silently into the other craft

He continued to lie there limply

Clyde's foot was on next to the bottom rung

CHAPTER ONE

Roger Baxter braked his bicycle expertly at the back steps, jumped off, let it go, and then caught it a split second before it struck the ground. He laid it down gently and took the three steps in a leap. Inside the little rear hall of the house he stopped to sniff.

"Muffins!"

"No, you don't," his mother said a moment later, deftly blocking his path to the muffin tin. "At least not until you put your bicycle away."

Curiosity got the better of Roger before he could look properly hurt. "How do you know I didn't?" he asked. "You didn't hear it fall, did you?"

Mrs. Baxter smiled over her shoulder. "No. But I didn't hear it scrape against the side of the house either. Now go ahead, and stand it where it belongs."

"Tried to fool Mom, didn't you? You ought to know better by this time." Roger's younger brother, Bill, assumed an expression of irritating superiority. "I put *my* bike away. So can I have a muffin, Mom?"

"Did you--?"

"Yes. I washed. Look."

Mrs. Baxter glanced at Bill's outstretched hands, and then pushed back the sleeves of his sweat shirt. Silently she pointed to the dark line where the cuff ended.

"You ought to know better, too," Roger grinned, as Bill clumped disgustedly back upstairs to wash again. Then he went outside himself to set his bicycle against the wall.

"You know, Mom," he said five minutes later, as they all sat at the kitchen table with glasses of milk and a plate of muffins, "me and Bill-I mean, Bill and I-we've got an idea."

"It's about time," Mrs. Baxter said. "It must be all of four hours since you had your last one. That idea you had at breakfast this morning, when I was trying to get Dad out of the house to catch his train-"

"Oh, that." Roger shrugged. "That was just Bill being silly. This idea now-"

"I don't know what was silly about it," Bill interrupted. "Pop said we couldn't go along with him because the trains were too crowded, and all I said was that we could paste stamps on ourselves and get sent like letters. Even if it was kind of stuffy in the mail bags, we could-"

"Do you want to talk about you-know-what, or don't you?" Roger demanded.

"Sure I do. I was only saying it wasn't so silly."

"Before we get involved in a discussion of your new idea," his mother said, "I want to tell you both some news. About the cottage."

"The cottage!" the boys echoed together.

"That's what our idea is about," Roger went on.

"Then you'd certainly better listen to me before you go any further with it. We've rented the cottage."

"Rented it!" Bill wailed.

"But gee, Mom," Roger said, "what we wanted to do was make a windmill up there, hooked up to that old generator Pop's got out in the garage. We were going to have a swell time."

"I'm sorry, boys. Really I am."

Roger brightened. "Listen, Mom. If our windmill works all right, we'll be able to have electric lights in the cottage. And then you could get a lot more money for it. Why don't you wait and rent it then? Who'd want it now anyway, without lights or anything? Do the people who're renting it know it hasn't got electricity in it?"

"It's not people. It's one man. And he seems to know all he wants to know. Here's his letter. You can read it for yourself. And you'll understand that we can't afford to turn down his offer, even if it does mean you can't build your windmill."

Together the boys bent dejectedly over the sheet of folded paper she handed them, and spread it out.

"Dear Mr. Baxter," they read,

"Last week, driving through Seaview, I noticed the little cottage on the bluff and inquired around in town until I discovered that you are its owner. I wonder if you'd care to rent it to me for several months this summer? I'm recovering from an operation, and feel sure the quiet and salt air would be good for me.

"Mr. Davis, at the store, informed me that \$150 for a two-month

period might be satisfactory. I am therefore enclosing my check for that amount, and a letter of reference from my bank. Should the sum be inadequate, I shall make up the difference when I arrive.

"If you decide to let me come I hope you can let me know by the first of the month, as I should like to move in about the fifth. From Mr. Davis' description, I'm sure the furnishings and facilities will be quite satisfactory.

"Very truly yours,

"Robert Warner."

"So you see," Mrs. Baxter said as they finished, "I don't know very much about it myself. The letter just came this morning and your father barely had time to glance at it and tell me to go ahead if Uncle Willie thought it was all right."

"Is this Mr. Davis he talks about in the letter-does he mean Uncle Willie?" Bill asked.

"I suppose so. I'm going to phone Uncle Willie in a few minutes and ask him about it."

Roger shook his head. "And Pop's willing to let a perfect stranger move into our cottage-just like that."

His mother smiled. "It's hardly likely we'd be able to rent it to friends of ours. They all seem to have houses of their own. Really, boys, the money will be very handy; the cottage hasn't been rented for two years, you know. Oh, yes-your father did say one more thing. He suggested that you boys start cleaning out the cottage today, just in case."

"That's putting pepper in the wound," Bill muttered.

"You mean salt," Roger corrected morosely.

"Who cares? Pepper burns just the same. Gee, first we can't rig up our generator and then on top of that- Say, do you suppose that old Mr. Warner would let us build a windmill up there even if he was living in the cottage?"

Mrs. Baxter shook her head firmly. "He says he's been sick. He's looking for peace and quiet."

"We could let him use our rowboat if he would," Bill pointed out.

"I scarcely think rowing would interest a convalescent either," his mother said, dryly.

"Well, he could buy an outboard motor for it then."

Roger got to his feet. "You're just talking nonsense," he declared. "Come on. We might as well get started. It's O.K., Mom," he added, "we don't care about the generator-not much anyway."

His mother smiled at him and he grinned back. "Uh- by the way-we'll have to go down to Uncle Willie's first, but it won't take long."

"I'm sure we've got all the mops and brooms you'll need, right here," Mrs. Baxter said.

"I know, Mom. But-well, you see, we sort of busted a window up at the cottage yesterday, and we'd better get a new one. It was only one of the tiny panes in the big living-room window. We can put it back easy."

Mrs. Baxter sighed. "All right. But don't cut yourself. Are you sure you know how to do it?"

"Sure. And Pop's got putty in the garage."

A few minutes later their two bikes were coasting down the hill to the center of the village, half a mile away. Automatically, halfway down, they both glanced at the graceful span of the highway bridge crossing the inlet to their right.

"I wish Pop built more of his bridges around here," Bill muttered.

"How many times do I have to tell you: he doesn't build bridges. He only designs them."

"Well, I wish he designed more around here then. I bet if Pop was going to be at home this summer he wouldn't want any old stranger up in the cottage either."

It had been six years before, when Mr. Baxter designed the highway bridge, that he discovered the little village of Seaview and brought his family there to live. Roger had been eight then, and Bill had been six. Mr. Baxter had bought the cottage on the bluff, first, and they had lived there for a while. Then, later, he had built the house

they lived in now. The cottage had been rented for the first two summers after they left it, but recently the boys had come to regard it more or less as their private property.

"You can't tell." Roger shrugged. "Pop might like the guy, and then he'd have him around *our* house all summer, too. This way we can just ignore him, and try to think up some other good idea to go to work on."

When they braked to a stop they found Uncle Willie watching them from the porch of the Seaview General Store, where he sat gently fanning himself. Uncle Willie was their mother's brother. He had come out to visit them one summer and decided to stay. So he had given up his business in the city, bought the store, and here he was, fatter than ever and growing more contented every day.

"We've got a bone to pick with you," Bill said as he dismounted.

"Nice day for picking bones," Uncle Willie answered politely. "Any special kind? Chicken?"

"Don't try to wriggle out of it," Roger cautioned him. "We're really pretty sore. Why did you have to go and tell that man who owned the cottage?"

"He asked me."

"Oh." For a minute Roger was stymied by the simple answer. "Well, you know what he did?"

Uncle Willie nodded. "He rented it."

"Yeah. And do you know what that's going to do to our summer?"

The big head nodded again. "You think you're going to have to look for another place to build your windmill generator."

"Gosh!" Bill exploded. "So you knew about that, too-and you went right ahead and told him anyway! *Some* uncles like their nephews, and don't try to play mean tricks on them all the time."

"I like my nephews very much," Uncle Willie pointed out placidly, "in spite of numerous events in the past which might have left a serious mark on my affection. But how do you expect me to treat a man who says he's been sick and wants to live by the sea to get his strength back? Do you expect me to throw him out?"

"No. But you didn't have to tell him about *our* cottage."

"I didn't tell him. He'd already seen it. And besides it's the only empty place around here."

"Well-just the same, it's too bad about our windmill. This one was going to be good."

"Why don't you go ahead and build it then? Mr. Warner won't care."

Both Roger and Bill opened their eyes wide.

"How do you know?" Roger asked suspiciously.

"Because I asked him. I told him my two nephews were slightly crazy and liked to build things all the time, and probably had something in mind for this summer. And he said he liked crazy boys and as far as he was concerned they could build anything they liked-such as windmills. He said he didn't care a bit."

"Well, what do you know about that!" Bill breathed.

"You didn't think we were planning just a cardboard

windmill, or something like that, did you?" Roger asked, still wary. "We want a real one. We'll have to hammer and saw and-and make a lot of noise. If he's been sick-"

"I know how much noise you make, whether you're building something up or blowing it down." And Uncle Willie glanced meaningfully toward a patch of new siding on the store, where a portion of the wall had blown out not long before, as the .result of Baxter experiments with a chemical set.

"Mom always said it was a mistake on your part to give us that set," Bill pointed out defensively.

"And she also said that grown men shouldn't help kids blow up buildings. She said it wasn't dignified," Roger added.

"I expect she's right," Uncle Willie agreed. "Especially when the kids in question would probably have been perfectly capable of doing it without any help. But fo get back to this windmill question: isn't there some newfangled notion around that if you give a man something to take his mind off his sickness, he'll get well sooner?

Maybe Mr. Warner thought building a windmill would be good medicine."

"You mean he wants to help us?" Bill brightened.

"You mean he wants to butt in?" Roger hadn't brightened at all.

"But why couldn't he help us if he wants to?" Bill turned on him. "Pop always does, when he's around."

"Sure. But Pop's an engineer."

"Well, maybe Mr. Warner is, too. Is he, Uncle Willie?" "I couldn't really say, not knowing."

"Ah." Roger looked at him from under lowered lids. "So you don't know? He might even be a bandit or something, huh? And you want him to live in our cottage."

"Do banks give references to bandits?" Uncle Willie asked mildly. "Aren't you being a mite unreasonable?"

"Sure he is." Bill nodded. "Gee, Rog, if he really knows

something about windmills and generators, he could be a big help. It'll be swell."

"And if he doesn't, and just gets in our way all the time-No, thanks. I think we'll just stay away from that cottage while Mr. Warner is around. Maybe we'll build our windmill down here some place."

Uncle Willie sat up straight in a sudden burst of energy. "You will not. I am definitely planning on a quiet summer, myself. Anyway, there's not enough wind down here. Now just forget that idea. Right away. Is this all you came down here for-just to pick a fight with me about Mr. Warner? Because if it is-"

"No," Roger admitted. "We need a pane of glass for a window that sort of got broken accidentally up at the cottage. And, of course, if it weren't for you fixing it up so we're going to rent it, we wouldn't have to be buying it at all. We could just paste paper up instead."

Uncle Willie struggled to his feet. "All right. All right. I'll donate the glass-but it's just plain blackmail. That's all it is. Come on in."

As he turned toward the door a big lumbering shape suddenly

heaved itself up on the porch, and a hoarse sound more a bellow than a bark rent the air.

"Hello, Duckfoot," Bill greeted him fondly. "How'd you know we were down here?"

Duckfoot's huge pink tongue covered Bill's outstretched hand, and his big feet slid awkwardly around on the slippery wooden floor. Duckfoot's ancestry was a matter of dispute, but his loyalty and affection were beyond question.

Uncle Willie groaned. "It's a wonder I can stay in business-what with feeding you and that dog several times a day, and repairing my house after you blow it up, and supplying you with glass and any other little odds and ends you happen to want. I'm going to go bankrupt, that's what I'm going to do. But come on in. I got a new cookie barrel opened today. You might as well start in on it now as later."

CHAPTER TWO

"It's pretty tight," Roger said, coaxing the pane of glass into place. "But it ought to fit." He pushed a little harder and there was a sharp crack followed by the tinkle of falling glass. "Oh."

"I thought you said it was easy to put glass in," Bill pointed out.

"Well, it is. It isn't my fault if the frame is too small." Roger sat down. "I suppose now we have to go back to Uncle Willie's and get another one."

"You probably mean / have to go back to Uncle Willie's," Bill said resignedly. "Just because you happened to be born two years ahead of me, you think I should do all the dirty work."

"Okay. If that's the way you feel about it, I'll go. But you'll have to finish the cleaning while I'm away."

"Sure. I've been cleaning for two days now. It's a habit by this time."

"Well, finish up the living room. And don't forget to move the couch when you mop the floor."

"Sure, sure. Leave it to me.

"Finish up the living room-that's all," Bill muttered when Roger had left. "It *would* be the biggest room in the house."

It was, too. It ran across the entire front width of the cottage-about thirty feet-and it was almost half the cottage in depth. It looked to Bill, as he surveyed it, as if it were big enough to play tennis in. He rested for a minute, staring out through the broad windows at the coast-guard tower gleaming white in the afternoon sun, almost a mile away, and at the islands in the bay almost below the cottage. Then he turned resolutely away and walked into the kitchen for a mop and a pail of water.

On the way back he paused for a moment in the doorway of a small room that they hadn't touched yet. Its floor was littered with tools and old boards. This was where they had begun to build their windmill, before the news about renting the cottage ruined all their plans.

"Gosh," Bill said, "we'd better get this junk out of here."

It was too bad about the windmill. They had assembled the wheel on the morning Mr. Warner's letter came, and it was a sad sight to see it leaning against the wall, so nearly finished-and so useless now. Roger had made the wooden blades earlier, for a previous venture they'd had in mind, and had spent nearly three weeks shaping them from a design he'd found in a book. There were four of them, resembling aeroplane propellers, and they made a wheel nearly six feet high.

"Pretty good job," Bill thought morosely, rubbing his hand over the still-unvarnished wood. In another couple of weeks they could have had it finished and mounted on the roof.

"Heck," Bill muttered aloud.

"What's the matter?" a voice said behind him. "Won't it work?"

Bill spun around, and stared at the stranger in the doorway. He was a youngish man-younger than Pop, anyway. Tall and thin, with a nice smile. He had his hands in his pockets and was leaning comfortably against the door jamb.

"What's the matter?" he repeated. "Won't it work?"

"I guess we won't find out for a long time." Bill was so surprised he couldn't think of anything to do but answer. "We were going to put it up on the roof of the house, for a windmill, but now the cottage has been rented and we can't. And we had a generator and everything."

He blinked his eyes, as a sudden thought struck him.

"You're not Mr. Warner, are you?" he demanded.

"That's what people call me-when they're being formal," the stranger admitted. "When they get to know me better they usually switch to Slim."

"But-you weren't supposed to come for two days yet."

Mr. Warner hitched a battered kitchen chair toward himself with one of his long legs, and sat down on it, backward. "I know. But it got so hot in the city that I just thought I'd run out and move in even if the place wasn't quite ready for me." He looked at the clutter in the room and grinned. "And I can see it isn't."

Bill pulled himself together. "Well, gee, Mr. Warner," he said, "we'll get it ready in a jiffy. I'm almost finished with the living room now. And the rest of the house is about done."

"No hurry. And now that I'm here I can help."

Bill picked up the mop and pail he had absent-mindedly set down, and moved toward the living room. "I wish Rog was here," he muttered to himself.

"Who's Rog-and what's he got to do with it?"

"He's my brother. And I guess maybe he'd know what to do." There were, once in a while, occasions when Bill was perfectly willing for Roger to assume the responsibilities of his advanced age.

"Well, there isn't anything to worry about, is there? I arrived unexpectedly, so it's not your fault if the place isn't ready. As long as I have a place to sleep tonight, and somewhere to cook breakfast tomorrow-well, we can finish the rest of the work when we get around to it. How many rooms are there, anyway?"

"I'll show you." Bill led the way around politely, through the big living room, the kitchen, another small room similar to their workroom, the bath, the big porch and the terrace.

Mr. Warner walked to the edge of the terrace and looked down at the inlet. "What are those islands over there, Bill?"

"That one there is Crab Island," Bill explained, pointing. "And the man who lives on it is one."

"One what?"

"One crab." Bill laughed. "He chases us off every time we try to land there. And, besides, he crabs for a living."

"You mean he gets paid for yelling at you?"

"Oh, no." Bill couldn't help laughing again. "He catches crabs and sells them. His name is Mr. Tinkham and that's his business."

"I see. And over there?"

"That's Smugglers' Island. A man named Mr. Clyde owns it, and you can see by what a big house he has how rich he is. He's got a big cabin cruiser, and a sailboat and a speedboat and I guess a couple of rowboats, too-and he only comes here during the summer." Bill's tone indicated that to invest so much money in equipment, and then to use it only a few months each year, was proof, indeed, of boundless wealth.

"Hmm. Some layout," Mr. Warner murmured, properly impressed. "Wait a minute."

Bill noticed for the first time that a battered old car stood at the edge of the road. Mr. Warner went toward it, opened the door, and took a leather case from the seat.

"Now we can get a good look," he said. He took a large pair of binoculars from the case and held them up to his eyes. "You're right about the rowboats, Bill," he said a moment later. "He's got two of them. One has an outboard motor, too."

"Gosh! Can you see it from here?"

"Sure. Take a look for yourself." He handed the glasses over, and showed Bill how to focus them.

"Boy," Bill said softly. "You sure can see through these things." He swung them around. "There's Old Man Tinkham crabbing. And there's-" he was facing inland now-"there's Mom out in the garden! Oh-

oh! And there's Rog coming." He handed the glasses back hastily and streaked into the living room.

"What's the hurry?" Mr. Warner laughed, following more slowly.

"Rog told me to mop the floor while he was gone." He was already sloshing water around furiously, and Mr. Warner put the binoculars on the mantelpiece and began to move the furniture so that Bill could clean under it.

By the time Roger came in nearly half the floor was done.

"Whose car is that outside?" Roger asked from the porch. And a moment later he saw Mr. Warner.

"This is Mr. Warner, Rog," Bill said quickly. "He came a little early, but he doesn't mind the place not being all fixed up yet."

"Hello," the man said.

"Hello." Roger stood still in the door for a moment longer, looking him over carefully. "I'm sorry we're not ready for you, sir, but-"

"It's my own fault-and nothing to worry about anyway."

"Yes, sir," Roger said.

Bill looked at him, trying to catch his attention by winking rapidly. He wanted Roger to know that Mr. Warner was okay, and that it wasn't necessary to be so stiff and polite with him. Roger didn't seem to realize what a nice guy he was.

But Roger didn't notice the signals. He was walking toward the broken window.

"I'd better get this in," he said stiffly.

"Here-let me help you with that," Mr. Warner suggested, joining him. "We'd better scrape more of that old putty out first." He picked up the knife on the sill that Roger had been reaching for, and deftly cleaned out the frame. "There. Now try it."

Roger slipped the pane into place. It fitted perfectly.

"Where are your glazier's points?"

"Here, sir."

Mr. Warner drove them in and nodded. "A little putty, and she'll be tight as a drum now." And he wandered away.

While Roger was daubing putty silently along the edge of the glass, Bill edged over near him and whispered, "He's okay."

Before Roger could answer, their guest spoke from the doorway of the still-uncleaned workroom. "You don't have to bother cleaning this room out at all, unless you want to," he said. "I've got a bedroom, and that big living room. I won't need this. And if you want to go on working here, you won't be in my way. I think I might even be able to help you with your idea for a generator, if you'd let me."

"See?" Bill hissed, grinning.

But Roger didn't look pleased. "I'm afraid we'd be too noisy, sir. I know you've been sick. I think we'd better clear out."

"There are some kinds of noise I don't mind," Mr. Warner said easily. "And I'd be more than glad to have electric lights, if you think your generator would provide them."

"Sure it would," Bill put in eagerly.

"But-" Roger stopped, awkwardly.

"Let's just let it go for a day or two anyway," Mr. Warner said, "and you can decide what you want to do. Of course-"

The noise of a car motor interrupted them, and Bill, looking out the window, said, "It's Mom and Uncle Willie."

A moment later they were entering the house.

"Hello, there," Uncle Willie said, extending his hand. "Mildred, this is Mr. Warner. My sister, Mr. Warner-Mrs. Baxter."

"How do you do?" she began. "I can't tell you how sorry-"

"Please don't say it." Mr. Warner grinned. "If any more people apologize for the house not being ready, I'll feel I ought to go right back to town. Really, I don't mind at all- if you don't."

Mrs. Baxter smiled. "Of course not. And we'll try to get things fairly comfortable for tonight at least. Come on, boys."

"Good idea." Uncle Willie settled himself on the nearest chair.

"Let's get this place cleaned up, by all means."

Mrs. Baxter began to issue orders, and the boys went to work. Mr. Warner insisted on helping, and by moving Uncle Willie from one chair to another, they finally managed to complete the living room. Then Mrs. Baxter took the boys to the kitchen to dry the pots and pans, all of which she insisted upon washing before she consented to call it a day.

"There," she said, sitting down beside her brother on the porch swing, where he had finally settled to escape from "all this hullabaloo." She smiled at Mr. Warner. "You must come down and eat with us tonight."

"That's very good of you, but I can eat at the inn-or get a few supplies and fix up something for myself right here. I'm a pretty good cook."

"It won't be any trouble at all. I've got a big stew simmering right now. And besides, if you come down I won't have to make another trip up here with your towels. I forgot them this afternoon."

"In that case-" He smiled his thanks.

"Don't think about me, Mildred," Uncle Willie complained. "I was planning to sell him a good order of groceries-but don't think about me."

Mr. Warner laughed. "You can sell me plenty-for tomorrow. By the way, I'd feel a lot more welcome around here if you'd all call me Slim. And now as soon as I get my bags in my room-" He moved toward the four big valises at the edge of the terrace. "I brought them only this far because I was afraid they'd be in your way inside."

"Let Roger get them," Mrs. Baxter said quickly. "Roger."

"Please. I don't mind at all."

"Nonsense. You've been sick. You shouldn't have carried them that far."

Roger bent down to take a bag in each hand. But a moment later, with a strange look at their new tenant, he picked up only one and lugged it into the bedroom. When he had completed the job, in four trips, he returned to the porch to hear his brother saying excitedly, "You were right, Uncle Willie. Mr. Warner says he will help us with

the windmill."

"Bill," his mother reprimanded him, "you mustn't bother Mr. Warner-Slim, I mean," she corrected herself with a smile, "with your ideas."

"It was my idea, Mrs. Baxter," Warner said quickly. "I like to fool around with such things. And, as I told the boys, I'd be glad to have the electricity. I brought a six-volt radio along, and it would be pleasant if I could use it."

"You may not have electricity even if they do get their contraption fixed up," Uncle Willie pointed out dryly. "And now how about some supper? Was I invited too, Mildred?"

"I suppose so. You'll come whether you're invited or not, so you might as well consider yourself invited."

"Good. Thanks very much. You boys can ride with Slim, and I'll take Mildred. Come on."

Roger was silent on the way down to the house; while Bill chatted away, and when they were at home and Uncle Willie had taken Mr. Warner off to see the view from the porch, he held Bill back from following them.

"Now what's the matter?" Bill demanded. "What's wrong with you today, anyway? Slim's swell, and he wants us to go ahead with the windmill and everything. And you've been acting like he was poison."

"Well, I've been noticing things. That's what I wanted to tell you."

"What things?"

"Well, those bags, for one. You didn't try to pick them up, but I did. Did you see him carrying them in from the car?"

"Sure. What about it? He brought them two at a time."

"He did? Well, let me tell you, those things are heavy. I could hardly carry one-and I can lift fifty pounds easy. And if he's still supposed to be sort of sick, how could he carry two? Besides, I don't think he wanted me to carry them. He tried to stop me-remember?"

"He was probably being polite. And suppose he is sick? Maybe his arms aren't."

"That shows how ignorant you are. When a person is sick, he's weak. And even if he can lift heavy things, he isn't supposed to."

"Well, maybe he's more polite than he is sick."

"If he was just being polite, why did he carry two at once before? I tell you what I think: I think he isn't sick at all."

"Oh, you're crazy," Bill said disgustedly. "Anyway, he said himself he was getting better."

"And there's another thing," Roger went on. "That car of his. It looks like an old wreck on the outside-but the motor sounds practically new. Why would a man put a brand-new motor in an old car that's practically ready for the junk pile?"

"How should I know? Maybe the motor's old, too, and he just takes good care of it."

"I don't think so. What I think is that he doesn't want people to know how powerful the car is. Then if he's chased by the police, or something, he'll surprise them."

"The police!" Bill stared at him. "Say, are you-?"

"No, I'm not crazy."

"Then why don't you tell Mom all this?" Bill demanded.

"Because she'd only laugh at me."

"Well, I'm laughing too." And then Bill looked grim. "Does this mean you're not going to build the windmill or anything-just because you've got some dopey idea that-?"

"No. We'll build the windmill, all right. We've got to stick pretty close to Mr. Slim Warner, and find out more about him. And building the windmill will be a good way to do that."

CHAPTER THREE

"Don't bolt your food," Mrs. Baxter said. "And maybe you won't mind telling me why you're up so early?"

"It's not so early, Mom," Roger murmured.

"And besides," Bill added, "we've got to keep an eye on Mr. Warner."

"Keep an eye on Mr. Warner?" his mother echoed. "What on earth--?"

Roger kicked Bill under the table. "What Bill means is that we've got to go up there and finish cleaning up. And of course we've got to keep an eye on him so he doesn't work too hard himself." He glared at his brother.

"Sure. That's what I mean. And anyway, Mr. Warner said we could go ahead and build our windmill, so we've got to go to work on that, too."

"Something tells me that that young man is going to regret his kindness."

"He'll live to ruin the day," Bill agreed, smiling smugly to himself over his own joke, until he became aware of Roger's furious frown.

"Rue the day, I guess you mean," his mother corrected. "Though ruin is probably more to the point-the day and the cottage as well, I'm afraid, unless you boys behave yourselves."

"Gee, Mom," Bill protested, "I was only kidding. We never ruined anything, anyway, except maybe-"

"Come on, Bill," Roger interrupted hurriedly, getting up. "We'll be back for lunch, Mom."

"I could have figured that out for myself." Mrs. Baxter smiled. "All right-run along. But try not to make Mr. Warner's first day too strenuous."

When Roger closed the door behind them he turned on Bill. "Boy, you sure are a dumb bunny! What did you have to talk like that for? Want Mom to start worrying and catch on to what we're going to do?"

"Oh, you're always worrying," Bill said, climbing on his bicycle. "Mom won't catch on-if there's anything to catch on to. I still think-"

"She won't, huh? She's about twice as smart as both of us together. If she gets the idea that Mr. Warner is a suspicious character,

she'll have us out of there so fast we won't even know what hit us-and then we'll never be able to make our investigation."

Bill stood on the pedals to make the hill. "Okay," he said, between puffs. "I'll be careful. But what are we going to do, anyhow?"

"I don't know yet, exactly. We'll have to- Stop here a minute where we can talk, before we get to the top of the hill where he can see us." And when both their bikes had been laid on the ground, and they were settled in the shade, he went on slowly, "I figure it this way. We have to just watch him for a while, to make sure we're right. Then, if we are, we can do one of two things: we can tell Mom or Uncle Willie about him, or we could go to the police ourselves."

"Or we could capture him," Bill suggested hopefully, beginning to be interested. "You know-trap him and tie him up, and *then* call the police."

"Well, maybe." Roger looked dubious. "Anyway, the first thing we have to do is observe."

"But what's he going to be doing while we're observing?" Bill wanted to know. "Won't he be doing some observing too? And if he catches us at it-"

"He won't, if we put him off the track. We'll pretend we're only interested in the windmill, but while we're working on it we'll keep our eyes open. We'll try to find out what's in his luggage first. That ought to give us a clue. Those bags were awfully heavy. I don't see how clothes could weigh that much."

"And he brought *four* bags," Bill pointed out eagerly. "Would he need four bags full of clothes?"

"That's something we'll have to find out. We'll make that our first-uh-objective. All right, let's go. But remember now-none of those remarks of yours. We're up here to build a windmill, and that's all."

"I'll remember."

They pedaled their way up the rest of the hill, and then turned to ride along the path at the top of the bluff. The water below them was blue in the bright sunlight, and they could see the boats and launches at Smugglers' Island rocking gently in the swell.

"Hello," a voice said suddenly, as they neared the cottage. And

Mr. Warner came out of a clump of bushes alongside the path on the left. His binoculars were slung around his neck, and he had changed his city clothes for an old pair of khaki trousers and a faded blue shirt.

The boys stopped abruptly and dismounted.

"We were coming up to work on the windmill," Roger said quickly. "We thought you'd still be eating breakfast." "Breakfast! I finished that an hour ago. I've been out here looking the harbor over. Nice view."

"If you don't want to go in and work on the windmill," Bill said, "we don't mind working by ourselves." He winked elaborately at Roger, as if to say "Then we'll have a chance to look over his stuff. Pretty smart, huh?"

"Nothing doing," Warner answered quickly. "You're not going to do me out of any of the fun. Anyway, I've seen enough out here for one morning. Come on-let's go."

When they entered the house the boys could see that their tenant had already put things pretty much in order. The heavy valises weren't in sight just inside the bedroom door, where Roger had left them; and he didn't get a chance to see if they had been unpacked yet because Warner herded them both right into the workroom.

"Did you balance this thing up?" he asked, pointing to the wheel.

"Not yet," Roger said. "But it ought to be almost balanced, because I cut all the blades from the same pattern."

"Well, let's see." Warner picked it up easily, and rested its shaft across the backs of two chairs, leaving the wheel free to revolve. Slowly it began to move, as one side, heavier than the other, rolled to the bottom and then half way up again. Then it reversed direction, rolling back.

"It is a little out of balance," Roger admitted. "We'll have to thin down a couple of those blades."

"Right. Doesn't look as though it would be much of a job, though. What about a generator?" Warner added. "Do you have one?"

"Sure," Bill told him. "From an old car."

"Six volts?"

Roger nodded. "We tried to get a bigger one, but our bank roll said no. So we'll use what we have."

"Hmm." Warner cleared his throat. "I wish to make an announcement." He put one hand behind him and one on his chest, Napoleon fashion. "Since I intend to derive a certain amount of benefit from the electricity expected to result from this project, I took it upon myself to supply a generator. Fortunately I had one at home that I'm sure

will do-a generator from a bus, which must be at least twice as large as the ordinary car model."

"Gee, that's great!" Bill exploded. "How soon can we have it? Soon?"

"Well, yes. It ought to be here in no time. I-that is, I felt sure you could use it, so this morning while you two sluggards were probably still in bed, I wired for it." He had dropped his pose now and was grinning at them.

"Gee, that's great!" Bill repeated. "Isn't it, Rog?"

Roger nodded. "It sure is. Thanks for thinking of it, Mr. Warner."

Bill looked at his brother with disgust. How could Rog go on being suspicious of anybody as nice as Mr. Warner? Why, he'd just told them they could have something they'd been wanting ever since they first thought of a wind generator-and all Rog could say was "Thanks for thinking of it." And he didn't even sound as if he meant it. In an effort to make up for his brother's lack of warmth, Bill rushed on.

"Boy," he said, "now we'll have enough power to put lights all over the cottage, instead of just the one or two we thought we'd have." And he managed to make a face at Roger behind Warner's back.

Roger smiled suddenly at Mr. Warner and Bill sighed with relief. "That'll make everything fine. But you certainly must have got up early, to send that wire and get back here by now."

"Think nothing of it," Warner grinned. "I just phoned Western Union, and they did the rest. Now-how about getting up on the roof for a look around? Do you know already how you intend to mount the wheel up there?"

"Yeah, we made a sort of plan," Roger answered. "I'll have to look for it-it's around here some place. And then I'd better shave those blades. Bill could be showing you the roof in the meantime, if you want to see it."

"I guess I can shave those blades as well as you can," Bill retorted, and then he saw the look in Roger's eyes. "Okay. You win."

"Let's not have any dissension in the ranks," Warner grinned. "Come on, Bill."

Roger waited until he heard them climbing over the roof, and then he crossed the living room quietly and opened the bedroom door. There were the valises-two of them standing unopened in the corner, as heavy as they had been the day before; and the other two stacked one on top of the other, empty, against the wall.

Roger looked into the bureau drawers and found them full of clothes. He opened the closet door and saw that Warner had hung a couple of suits carefully on the hangers inside. He closed the closet door and went back to the valises in the corner. The snaps wouldn't open. They were locked.

He went back to the closet and moved the clothes to one side. There was nothing behind them. For a long moment he stood in the middle of the room, thinking. Then he went quickly back to the bureau and opened the top drawer. Without disturbing the neatly arranged clothes, he put his hand under them and felt around. He did that with the second drawer, and then opened the third. Suddenly he stiffened, his hand rigid in the far right corner under several sweaters.

He listened until he heard the reassuring sound of footsteps overhead, and then he carefully lifted out the sweaters and stood looking down at a heavy, ugly-looking automatic pistol.

Roger didn't know anything about automatic pistols- except that it was wisest to leave them alone. After a minute he put the sweaters back in place, over it, closed the drawer and went toward the door. With one hand on the knob, he stopped. Then he took a handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wiped off the door knob, the drawer pulls, and the edge of the closet door. When he went out he closed the door behind himself with his handkerchief over the knob. He was busily wielding a rasp on the blades of the windmill when Warner and Bill returned.

"How are you coming?"

"Pretty good. Let's try it again."

Warner set the wheel in place over the chair backs, and they watched it while it slowly settled with the heavy side down.

"That's better." The man nodded. "Just needs a little more now, and then some sanding after that. And I'd suggest a couple of coats of varnish to keep it smooth. The smoother it is, the less resistance it will offer to the wind, and the easier it will run."

"Rog, we've been figuring out how to connect the wires from the generator down to the house," Bill said importantly.

"Bill says you planned to use flexible wire, so the windmill can turn freely," Warner went on, picking up a piece of sandpaper and running it over one of the blades.

"That's right."

"But the windmill has to be free to turn completely around," Warner said. "If you connect wires to it, and the windmill keeps turning to face the wind, it won't be very long before the wires will be twisted off. We ought to devise some sliding contacts."

"That's what we need, all right," Bill agreed. "But how do we do it?"

"Well, let's see if we can't figure it out." Warner pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and fished around in another pocket until he found a pencil. "Where's that plan of yours, by the way?"

Roger handed him a grimy piece of paper. "We were going to build a short tower on the roof, out of some heavy beams we have lying around at home. We figured it didn't have to be more than about six feet high-that would be enough to lift the wheel above all the trees around here and give it a chance to get the wind right off the ocean. The top of the tower'll be two feet square-see?-like a table. And over it we were going to put an iron plate." "Pop has a plate in the garage we can use," Bill put in. "Anyway, we guess we can. It's been lying around for a couple of years, and we figure he doesn't want it any more."

Warner smiled. "Well, that's settled. So what were you going to do with this plate?"

"It's going to be a bearing for the rotating windmill;" Roger went on. "We were going to drill a hole right in the middle of it, and one

right under it in the wooden top of the tower, too, and set a shaft through them. The shaft will stick up about six inches above the plate. We're using the rear axle of an old car for that."

"Very smart." Warner nodded. "You know how to make use of available materials, all right. If I don't look out, you'll have that old car of mine taken apart the next time you need a bolt."

"We already have enough stuff," Bill grinned. "You're safe."

"Well, anyway," Roger went on a little abruptly-Bill was looking at Warner as if he were some kind of hero- "anyway, we were going to mount the windmill and generator on a wooden platform with a hole in the middle of it, so it would fit right over the shaft that sticks out above the tower, too. Then the whole windmill and generator can swing around to face the wind."

"Hmm." Warner studied the plan carefully. "I can see a couple of things that might give you a little trouble. In the first place, it's going to be pretty hard to swing that windmill around. I suppose the whole thing-the generator and wheel and tail and platform and all-will weigh at least 150 pounds. And, that's going to be pretty hard to move, especially when you've got one two-foot surface rubbing against another two-foot surface."

"Oh, we thought of that already," Bill said. "We've got an old pair of roller skates. You know how they come apart in the middle, so you can make them fit your foot?" Warner nodded.

"Well, we took them apart, so we have four sets of wheels. We're going to fasten one set on each corner of the windmill platform, and then the whole windmill will roll around on wheels. That iron plate is good and smooth, so the wheels will roll easy on it, and the windmill will swing around like nothing at all."

"Say, that's all right!" Warner looked at both of them admiringly. "You've got that problem licked. Then all we have to worry about is the sliding contacts that'll transfer the electricity from the generator, which is free to swing around, to the stationary tower."

"There's another problem, too," Roger admitted, pleased in spite of himself at Warner's praise, but trying not to let it influence his opinion. "The trouble is, we don't know very much about windmills and generators. If Pop was here he could tell us."

"I thought your father was a bridge designer. Is he an electrical

engineer, too?"

"No," Bill answered, "but Pop is interested in practically everything. If he doesn't know the answer when we ask him something, he knows just where to look it up in some of his books."

"Handy man to have around." Warner smiled. "You said it," Bill agreed proudly. Roger didn't want to talk to Warner about his father. "What I was going to say," he went on, "is that even if we don't know much about them, we do know that the generator on a car runs pretty fast. It runs faster than the motor does, and we'd sort of figured that the one we have should turn about 1,500 revolutions a minute to do its best work. Well, we think our wheel won't turn more than 300 revolutions a minute in an ordinary wind. So that means we'll have to gear the generator up about five to one. We've got the gears, all right, but they're just plain gears, and it'll be pretty hard to keep them greased when they're running outdoors. Every time it rains, it'll wash all the grease off and we'll have to climb up and re-oil them."

"Besides, Pop says you lose power when you use gears," Bill put in, obviously proud of having brought up this recollection. "So what we ought to have is a slow-speed generator that we could connect right to the windmill shaft. But we haven't got one-so why worry about it?"

"I don't think we'll have to," Warner said. "I mean, you can regard that problem as solved-I think. That generator of mine, if I remember correctly, is slow .speed-slow enough to connect directly to the wheel."

"Wheel" Bill shouted. "That does it! Gee!"

Roger's eyes narrowed. "But you said it came off a bus, didn't you? And bus generators run about as fast as car generators, don't they?"

"Sure, I guess they do." Warner began to fill his pipe, and continued to look down at it fixedly as he talked. "But the reason I think this one will be all right is because my kid brother was fooling around with it once, and I think he had it rewound to make a slow-speed job out of it. I don't remember exactly, but I think it should run between 150 and 400 revolutions a minute. It's fixed up like a car generator, and you know how they work. They won't overcharge the battery even when the car is racing along, and they charge all right when the car is doing only about ten miles an hour, too."

"But how-?" Bill began, but Warner went on talking.

"And I think I've figured out a solution to the sliding contact problem, too. We can mount two copper rings on the underside of the windmill base—one about 10 inches in diameter, and the other about 14, with both of them centered on the shaft. We'll connect one ring to one of the wires leading from the generator, and the second ring to the other wire. The rings, of course, will turn with the windmill when the wind shifts direction. On the metal plate on top of the tower platform itself, we'll mount two spring contact arms, made out of copper, of course. One of these contacts will rub on one ring, the other on the second. Then, no matter how much the windmill swings around, these contacts will always take the electricity off the copper rings and carry it down to the house through wires which we'll attach to the spring contacts." He looked at them. "How does that sound?"

"It sounds all right, I guess," Roger said slowly. "If we can get all the stuff we need."

"We'll get it, all right." Warner grinned. "Don't forget I'm interested in electric lights for the house, so leave it to me."

Bill beamed happily, while Roger turned back to the wheel. "In the meantime," Roger said, "I'd better finish balancing this up."

"Good." Warner nodded. "Why don't Bill and I tackle the tower?"

Roger methodically ran the rasp back and forth and listened to the noise of hammering and sawing that came from the back yard of the cottage. There was something fishy in that glib explanation of how Warner's generator happened to be exactly what they needed, he thought. And something fishy about the way he'd wired for it. Where did he telephone from so early in the morning? There was no phone in the cottage, and he hadn't borrowed the Baxter's. And what about that pistol in the drawer? And that powerful car disguised as an old wreck? A lot of things were fishy.

Roger allowed the wheel to swing free, and noted that it was in almost perfect balance now. He set the rasp down and began to sandpaper the sections he had roughened with it. When Bill and Warner came in at half-past eleven, the wheel was ready for its first coat of varnish.

"Time to eat," Bill announced, dropping a handful of tools on the floor with a clatter.

"Yeah." Roger nodded. "We'd better get along home. Do you want to do some more work this afternoon, Mr. Warner? Or do you think you ought to get some rest?"

"The name is Slim, remember? Rest? Well, yes. Maybe I ought to take it easy. Do you suppose we could borrow a rowboat and go for a little ride? Might even do some fishing-if there are any fish in that bay of yours."

"Plenty of fish," Bill said eagerly. "And we have a rowboat, too, Slim. Only you'd better let us do the rowing."

"Good. And I won't argue with you about the rowing. I'll pick you two up at your house about half-past one. All right?"

As they coasted downhill toward their house, Bill pulled his bicycle over to the edge of the road preparatory to stopping.

"Keep going," Roger told him. "If he's out there with those glasses of his again, he can see anything we do."

"Gee-you're not still suspicious of him, are you?" Bill glared, straightened his bike, and glared again. "I figured if he was nice enough to give us a generator, he must be okay."

"Yeah. I could tell that's what you were thinking. But I don't believe that story about sending a wire. Where'd he send it from? Even if he got into Uncle Willie's the minute the store opened, he couldn't have got back to the cottage by the time we came."

"Maybe he went down to the gas station. There's a phone there."

"Walking, you mean? That would take a long time.

And if he drove past the house, wherever he was going, we'd surely have heard him. We might have missed him once, but we wouldn't have missed him coming and going both. Look, when we get home you go on in. I'll ride down to Uncle Willie's to get some varnish, and while I'm there I'll ask a couple of questions. I'll check at the gas station, too. I'm pretty sure of what the answers will be, but just to convince you- And remember, be careful of what you say in front of Mom."

When Roger got home a little later Bill, setting the table, looked at him questioningly. Roger shook his head. And when the phone rang a few minutes later, and Mrs. Baxter left the room to answer it,

he explained further.

"Uncle Willie didn't open up until half-past eight. And the gas station man said no one had called from there at all today." He washed his hands at the sink. "So he must have been lying about that generator, all right. But why? That's what I can't figure out."

"Oh, there's just some way he made the call that we haven't thought of," Bill urged. "You say yourself you don't know why he should lie to us."

"No. I don't. But- Look, maybe he's trying to win us over to his side. And then when the cops come for him, or something, we'll be his friends and will maybe hide him or lie for him or-"

"He's too smart for that," Bill argued. "He knows it wouldn't make us like him if he told us he'd give us a generator, and then didn't."

"Well, there's something else I haven't had a chance to tell you about." And Roger related the discovery of the pistol in the drawer.

Bill's eyes opened in surprise. "Gee! But-maybe he's afraid of burglars."

"What are you two plotting?" Mrs. Baxter smiled as she entered the room. "What's for lunch, Mom?" Roger asked hastily.

But before she could answer there was the sound of a car motor chugging in the road, and a moment later it stopped and was followed by a brisk knock on the back door.

"I'll go." Roger opened the door to face a man beyond whom he could see a huge truck bearing the sign ACME SPECIAL DELIVERY SERVICE. "Yes?" Roger said.

"I've got a package here for Robert Warner. Know where he lives?"

"Up the hill. You go right up that road to the top of the bluff." Roger eyed him carefully.

The driver stared. "Up that road? With this truck?"

Roger had an idea. "You can leave the package here for him, if you want to. He can take it up in his own car, if it's not too big."

"Swell. Thanks, kid. It's not very big, but it is kind of heavy. I'll

leave it right here on your porch and then he won't have to carry it so far. Sure you'll see he gets it, all right?"

"Sure. He's coming down here in a little while anyway."

Bill joined him at the door while the man returned to his truck for the package. It was a carton about two feet square, and obviously heavy.

"Sign here, kid."

Roger signed, and the man got into his truck and drove off. ,

"What is it?" Bill asked. "For Slim, huh?"

"Yeah."

The two boys leaned over the package and inspected it closely. It had been tied together rather loosely, and the wings of the cover stood slightly open. Roger poked his fingers through the opening and bent lower to stare in. Then he straightened slowly.

"It's a generator," he said. "A generator."

CHAPTER FOUR

Bill had just finished drying the last dish when a knock sounded on the back door, and Slim Warner's voice said, "Am I too early?"

"The boys are just about ready," Mrs. Baxter smiled. "Come in."

Roger looked up from the sink he was scouring and said in an even voice, "A package came for you, Slim."

"A package? For me?" He wrinkled up his forehead and then it smoothed out again. "Say, it must be the generator! That kid brother of mine didn't waste any time, did he? Where is it?"

"Out on the porch. I'll show you," Mrs. Baxter told him, leading the way. "Whatever do you need a generator for?"

"To improve our electrification system," he explained, as they disappeared together. "Anyhow, I hope it will."

Bill hung up the dish towel and glared at his brother. "There! You see?" "See what?"

"He didn't lie about it! So you must have been crazy after all."

"He couldn't risk lying about it. But that doesn't prove anything. We still know he didn't send a telegram-so how did it get here so soon?"

"How do I know? But there can't be anything so wrong about it or he'd-" Bill suddenly put his clenched fists on his hips and planted himself squarely in front of Roger. "Look. What would a desperate criminal be doing around here anyway? There's nothing to steal except bikes or row-boats or stuff like that. The whole idea sounds silly. It doesn't make any sense. All those things you told me-they sound pretty good when you say them all together, but-Well, I think you're just making a mountain out of a coal hill, that's what I think."

"Mole hill." Roger corrected him coldly. "You do, huh? Well, I'll tell you what he could be doing. At first I thought maybe he'd come here to hide away, but I don't think that any more. If he wanted to lay low, he wouldn't be letting us fool around up there, probably."

"Sure. That's what I'm trying to-"

"Wait a minute." Roger lowered his voice another degree. "Suppose he's a smuggler?"

"A smuggler!"

"Shh! D'you want him to hear us? Sure-why not a smuggler? We're right on the bay. And that's what he wants the electricity for," he ended triumphantly.

"What's electricity got to do with smuggling?"

"He has to have a powerful light, for signaling. Probably his confederates come along the shore in a boat and-" He broke off suddenly and began to whistle as he dried his hands.

"It looks all right," Warner said cheerfully, coming back into the kitchen. "In fact, I'm almost tempted to go back and do some more work on the windmill, so we can get it finished up in a hurry. But I guess I'd better not. Doctor's orders, you know!"

"Of course you mustn't. An afternoon in the sun will do you

good," Mrs. Warner told him. "And make sure you let the boys do all the rowing."

"I won't move a muscle," he grinned. "You two ready now?"

"We're ready," Roger said. "Come on," he added brusquely to his brother, who was standing staring at Slim with round eyes.

Bill jerked to attention. "Uh-yeah. I guess we'd better take some cookies along, hadn't we?" He ostentatiously busied himself at the cookie jar, filling a paper bag.

Duckfoot got up from the floor and thumped his tail at the sight of so much activity, and Bill added, "Guess we'd better take him, too."

"Sure. Let's take Duckfoot. How are you, boy?" Warner tickled his ear and the dog looked up at him happily.

A few minutes later Roger was leading the way along the narrow path that led down the steep grade below their garden toward the waterfront. Slim was behind him, followed by Bill. And Duckfoot brought up the rear, leaping awkwardly at flies and barking hoarsely to indicate his pleasure over the outing.

"Is that your dock down there?" Slim pointed to a wooden pier that extended about twenty feet into the water.

"Yep," Bill told him.

"That shed beside it looks like a boat garage."

"It is. Pop built a power boat about two years ago. We keep it in there. And he fixed up a hoist so we can pull the boat right out of the water for winter storage."

Roger trotted the last few feet and went out to the end of the dock. The others joined him, and Duckfoot growled at his reflection in the water.

"Say!" Slim exclaimed. "That's a sweet-looking row-boat!"

"Pop built that, too," Bill said proudly. He was himself again now. His eyes had lost their round startled look, Roger was relieved to notice. It probably meant that he was no longer impressed with Roger's suspicions, but it was better than having him go around like a walking question mark.

"She rows as easy as an eggshell," Bill was saying. "She's made so we could use an outboard motor on her-but we haven't got one yet."

Roger went into the shed, through its back door, and reappeared in a moment with two oars. "Let's go."

Bill pulled the painter of the rowboat until the little craft was alongside, and Duckfoot immediately jumped in and moved to the back seat, where he settled himself comfortably.

"He'll move over when you get in," Bill assured Warner.

So Slim followed, and helped Duckfoot accommodate himself to a smaller space. Roger got in next, with the oars. And while he slipped them into the oarlocks, Bill untied the line and jumped in himself. He sat down beside Roger on the rowing seat, and they each took an oar.

"Which way?" Roger asked politely. "We could go up toward the village, or across to the other side of the inlet, or out toward the coast-guard station. Oh-I forgot to ask you: did you want to bring a fishing line?"

"Oh, let's just loaf this afternoon, and look around. I don't care which way we go. What about the tide?"

"It's slack tide now," Roger explained, "so that doesn't make any difference. It'll be coming in soon, of course, and then it will be hard to row against."

"In that case, why don't we /go out toward the coastguard station? Then the tide will help on the way back."

The boys bent their backs at the oars, and the light boat began to skim through the water.

"How about going around that island there?" Warner suggested after a little, pointing off toward his left.

"That's Crab Island," Roger told him. "We can't land there."

"Oh, yes-I remember what Bill told me. But the old man can't prevent us from rowing around it, can he?"

"I guess not." Roger looked over his shoulder and shifted their course. "But it's just a plain old island-nothing but a lot of rocks and a couple of trees."

"There's Old Man Tinkham's shack and his dock, too," Bill added. "But they're up at the other end. You can't see them from here."

As they pulled around to the northern side of the island, the rock formation that had formed a solid wall along the west shore gradually gave way to a slope of sparse grass growing down almost to the water's edge, studded with a few scraggly trees. Now they could see the top of the small house in which Tinkham lived, and presently, when they rounded another curve, they could see the dock and the path leading up to the house. The place looked entirely deserted, and no boat was moored to the dock.

"The old man's not at home, I guess," Slim murmured. Then he grinned. "Looks like a nice time to visit the island."

"Not me!" Bill said hastily. "If he came home while we were there, he'd probably chase us off with a shotgun." "Really as bad as that? Is he one of the old-timers around here?"

"He's been here longer than we have," Roger said. "About seven or eight years, I guess. Nobody likes him." "So I gather. Well, too bad. I'd like to take a look around there-those rocks look sort of interesting. I studied a little geology once, and I've been curious about rocks ever since."

Just then they heard the faint popping of a distant motorboat, and Bill looked up hastily.

"That sounds like him now. I can always tell that one-cylinder motor of his. We'd better get out of here."

"What for?" Slim asked. "He doesn't own the whole bay."

"No. But I wouldn't put it past him to try to swamp us." The noise of the motor increased, and soon a boat rounded the corner, heading for the dock. They could see the hunched-up figure of Tinkham in the stern. He saw them, too, almost immediately, and leaned forward to throttle down his motor. Then he swung the tiller over and headed their way.

"Here he comes," Bill muttered. "I'm sure glad you're with us, Slim."

The crabber's boat came closer and closer, heading right for them as if it meant to cut the small rowboat in two. But when he was about fifty feet away, Tinkham swung about and cut around them in a wide

circle. Then he pulled in closer, disengaged his clutch and let the motor idle. As the two boats drifted side by side, the old man carefully looked Slim and the boys over.

"I told you to stay off my island," he said finally.

"Here it comes," Bill whispered.

"/ told you to stay off my island!"

"We're not on your island," Slim said pleasantly.

"Well, make sure you don't get on it. I don't like visitors!" He suddenly reopened the throttle and, without a backward glance, headed for his dock.

"You're right. He certainly is a nice friendly old codger," Slim said, as they watched him make fast to his dock.

"We told you," Bill grinned. "Boy, if you hadn't been along, he'd have sure yelled at us, all right. Rog, let's take him over to Smugglers' Island now. You want to go over there, Slim? We can even go ashore, if you want to. Mr.

Clyde's *swell*. He says we can come over there any time. He even called us in and gave us ice cream once."

At the words *ice cream* Duckfoot's tail began to thump the side of the boat, and Bill took a cookie out of the bag and gave it to him. He handed one each to Slim and Roger, too, and took one himself.

"I don't know," Roger said slowly. If Warner was really some kind of criminal, *he* didn't want to be the one to take him to Mr. Clyde's. Of course Bill-

"Why not?" Slim was saying. "It looks like a nice place. And if he should happen to have some ice cream around--well, we have the cookies to go with it."

Bill laughed, and began to pull on his oar. And Roger couldn't think of a good excuse to prevent the visit, so he gave in.

Smugglers' Island was as different from Crab Island as anything could be, except that the two were nearly the same size. But Mr. Clyde had spent a lot of money fixing his island up, and the results were obvious. He had built a concrete sea wall around most of it, and had

poured tons of good topsoil over the sand and rocks. So there was a smooth green lawn almost everywhere, with nicely graveled paths outlined by whitewashed rocks. On the lower side of the island-the one facing Crab Island-a small boat basin had been built. In it were moored a slim speedboat, and two rowboats, one with an outboard motor attached to the stern. A large boat garage and two large buildings that looked like shops were clustered around the dock.

As the boys neared the basin, a voice hailed them.

"Hi, there! Come on ashore!"

They looked up to see a figure on the dock waving to them.

"I guess you were right about him, too," Slim grinned, waving back.

"Sure. He's *swell*" Bill repeated.

They maneuvered the rowboat through the breach in the sea wall and past the sailboat. Mr. Clyde smiled down at them. He was a big man, with a genial ruddy face, dressed in handsome sport clothes.

"Glad you came by. You're just in time for milk and cookies-or would you rather have some ice cream?"

"Ice cream," Bill grinned. "And we brought our own cookies."

"Mr. Clyde," Roger spoke up, "this is Mr. Warner. He's rented our cottage for the summer."

"How do you do? I'm glad to know you." Mr. Clyde took Warner's hand and helped him up on the dock, and the boys climbed after him. "Didn't know anybody from the outside world ever heard of Seaview except me. Kind of quiet around here."

"Quiet and sea air are what I'm looking for."

"You can get them both here-and plenty of them. How've you boys been?"

They strolled up the green lawn as they talked, and when Mr. Clyde offered to show them over his island they all agreed. The boys had seen it all before, but the neatly-kept grounds were so different from the scraggly, sandy yards of Seaview homes that they always found it interesting. And Warner's enthusiasm was gratifying. Even

Roger couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction over having such an impressive friend as Mr. Clyde to show off to their tenant.

They wound up their sight-seeing tour with enormous dishes of ice cream, served by Mr. Clyde's housekeeper, and it was almost five o'clock when they finally took their departure. Their host walked down to the dock with them.

"Want me to give you a tow across?" he asked.

"The tide's coming in now," Roger said. "So all we'll have to do is coast home."

Mr. Clyde grinned. "I guess you're right. I never did seem to learn much about tides." He shook hands with all of them. "Come again-any time. I'm not here all the time, but when I am I like company."

"Thanks. I'd like to," Warner said.

There was little to do but direct the boat on the way back.

"Gee, you didn't get to see the coast-guard station," Bill remembered suddenly, as they neared home.

"That's all right. We've got plenty of time. And I don't suppose we'd have had any ice cream if we'd gone there instead."

When they got to the Baxter house the boys helped Slim lift the generator into his car, and a moment later he drove off.

"Well," Bill began, the moment they were alone, "what did you see that was suspicious this afternoon?" And he grinned at his brother challengingly.

"Nothing," Roger admitted. "Except that he seemed awfully curious about Crab Island."

"Oh, for gosh sakes!" Bill looked his disgust. "Gee, we used to be curious about it, too-until Old Man Tinkham chased us off a couple of times. Slim's interested in rocks-he said so."

"Yeah. He *said* so. You know, the trouble with you is you haven't got any mind of your own. When I told you I thought maybe Slim was a smuggler, you practically believed me. And then he comes along and is nice to you-

"Well, you have to admit he is nice to us," Bill interrupted.

"Sure he is. But that doesn't prove anything. Only every time you see him, you forget all about everything I've told you. But you can't explain how that generator got here so quickly. Can you?"

"No. But you never exactly proved what was wrong with it getting here quickly either," Bill retorted.

"But--"

"Supper's ready," Mrs. Baxter called from the doorway.

And once more they dropped their argument and went into the house.

They had just finished eating when the phone rang. Mrs. Baxter answered it, and they could hear the onesided conversation from the kitchen. It was Uncle Willie calling.

"Yes," his sister said after a minute. "I've got a pencil right here. Go ahead." There was silence for a moment and then she added, "I'll read it back: Did you get the generator all right? Do you need anything else? Signed Ed. All right, Will. I'll send the boys up to Mr. Warner's with it right away. Good night."

She handed them a piece of paper when she came back into the room. "This is a telegram that just came for Mr. Warner. I told Uncle Willie you'd take it up to him." "Sure, Mom."

By the time they reached the top of the hill it was getting dark. Roger had been expounding his theory all the way up the path, and Bill's arguments against Slim being a smuggler or some other kind of criminal were- Roger said-just feeble-minded. The trouble with Bill was, he pointed out, that he only believed what he wanted to believe. He liked Slim, so he wouldn't face facts. "Sure I like him. But--"

They were approaching the house and Roger put out a hand to stop him. "Shh. Wait a minute." "What's the matter?"

A warm glow came through the living-room windows, and a spiral of smoke drifting out of the chimney proved that Slim had lit a fire to take the early-evening chill out of the air. Bill looked at the house and then back at Roger. It all seemed so peaceful and quiet. What was Roger worrying about now? But he automatically went forward on tiptoe, as his brother was doing. And then he heard a voice inside the house.

"He's got company, I guess," he whispered. "How could anybody get here without passing our house? By airplane, maybe?" Roger retorted scathingly. "Maybe we didn't hear them."

Roger climbed the porch steps silently, and peered through a window of the living room. A lit lamp and the glowing fire gave enough light for them to be able to see quite clearly that the room was empty. And then they heard Slim's voice again.

"Sure. It arrived this afternoon. Good time," Slim was saying. "I went for a row with the boys today. Saw Crab Island and got a look at Tinkham. Then we went over to Smugglers' Island and met Mr. Clyde. Very friendly chap-which is more than I can say for Tinkham. Interesting name his place has got though, isn't it-Smugglers' Island? And by the way-"

Just then Bill stepped on a loose board and it creaked loudly. Slim's voice broke off abruptly. The boys looked at each other and, without a word, vaulted over the porch railing and dove for the bushes. They huddled there in silence as Slim came to the door, opened it to look out for a while, and then closed it again.

"Come on," Roger whispered, when he had disappeared, "let's get out of here."

"But what about the telegram?"

"Don't worry. We'll deliver it. But we're going to sneak through the bushes and come out on the toad around the bend. And this time when we get near the house we'll have to make a lot of noise. We don't want him to know we overheard him. I hope we get a chance to see who's in there with him, though."

They reached the path and started back for the house. "Go on," Roger said. "Say something loud." "What'll I say? I can't think of anything." "Whistle then. Or laugh. Here, I'll tickle you."

"Hey, cut it out," Bill shouted an instant later. "Rog, stop-please."

"That's the stuff," Roger said with satisfaction, as Bill's laughter rang out on the quiet night air. "Keep it up."

When they walked up on the porch the second time, they walked loudly, and knocked immediately on the front door.

"Come in," Slim said.

The living room looked just as it had a few moments before.

"It's us," Roger said.

"I'm in the bedroom, straightening out some of my stuff," Slim answered. "Come on in."

Roger took a quick glance into their workroom, and then into the kitchen, as they made their way to the bedroom door. There was no sign of a visitor anywhere. And when they went on into Slim's room, there was no stranger there, either. Slim was bending over a drawer-it was the drawer with the automatic in it, Roger remembered- putting away clothes.

"We've got a message for you-a telegram," Bill explained. "Uncle Willie telephoned it to us."

"Thanks." He took the piece of paper and read it. "My kid brother," he explained, when he finished. "Just wanted to know if the generator got here all right. Well-guess that's all I had to do in here." He shut the drawer and stood up. "Come on in by the fire anji sit down. I've been figuring out a schedule for tomorrow's work. See what you think of it."

When the boys got up to go, a little later, neither of them had seen or heard any sign of Slim's visitor, and he had not once referred to such a person. In fact, he was his usual self, cheerful, friendly and interested.

"Get here early," he told them, when he saw them to the door. "We'll get it mounted tomorrow if we can."

They walked down the path in the dark, without speaking, but when they got around the bend Roger stooped.

"I don't think there's anybody else in there, but I want to go back and take another look."

Bill opened his mouth to object, but Roger had already turned back, so he followed along.

This time they tiptoed again, and it was several moments before they were once more looking through the living-room windows. Slim was not in sight, but almost immediately they heard his voice, as they had heard it before. He was talking too low for them to catch the words, though, and after a few seconds Roger gave up.

"Come on," he breathed.

"What are you going to do?" Bill asked quietly, when they were some distance away.

"You believe me now-that there's something fishy about it all?"

"Yeah. I guess I do. I still don't know what it is, but I guess there's certainly *something* going on up there."

"You're convinced this time?"

"Yes. But what are we going to do?"

"I think maybe we ought not to try to do anything ourselves."

"You mean we should tell Mom?"

"I don't want to worry her. I think we ought to tell Uncle Willie, though, the first thing in the morning. He'll know what to do. Besides, he's responsible for Slim coming out here."

"Okay. We'll tell Uncle Willie." They walked a little further and then Bill added soberly, "Gee, it sure is creepy-him talking to somebody who isn't there."

"Don't worry," Roger assured him. "I guess there was somebody there, all right. He just didn't want us to find him. I don't know where he hid him, but- And did you notice what he said about liking the name of Smugglers' Island?"

"Yeah. I noticed." The road was deep in black shadows, and Bill unconsciously walked a little faster. It would be good to get into their own brightly lit house.

CHAPTER FIVE

Roger woke up unusually early the next morning, and lay for a long time staring up at the ceiling. Finally he lifted his head and looked across the room at Bill, and a moment later Bill turned over, opened his eyes and yawned.

"I was dreaming," he muttered. "About pirates."

"I didn't have time to do much dreaming," Roger said quietly. "I've been thinking."

"While you were asleep?"

"Before I fell asleep, and right now."

Bill yawned again. "I don't see what there is to think about. We decided last night to go down and tell Uncle Willie the first thing this morning, didn't we?"

"Sure, sure." Roger sounded impatient. "I know. But what I was thinking about is what Uncle Willie is going to say. Last night our story sounded pretty good-but how will it sound to him?"

"Why, the same way it sounded to us," Bill pointed out. "Slim had somebody in his house last night-a mysterious visitor. And they were talking about Smugglers' Island. We think Slim is up here to do some smuggling-or something-and we want Uncle Willie to do something about it. That's all there is to it." He raised up on one elbow and stared over at his brother. "Say, what is this? This is all *your* theory. Don't tell me now you don't even believe it yourself!"

Roger sat up and swung his feet over the side of the bed. "I believe it, all right. But I had plenty of trouble convincing *you*, even. And Uncle Willie-"

"Oh, well-" Bill's nose wrinkled. "That was before we knew about the mysterious visitor." He said the last two words in a low, hollow voice, as if he found them very impressive-as indeed he did. "Uncle Willie'll listen to us, don't worry. Say, you're not getting up, are you?" Roger had begun to unbutton his pajamas. "You'd better not. If we get up this early, Mom'll be curious."

"Yeah. I suppose so." Roger lay down again, resignedly, and stared up at the ceiling.

But even though they remained in bed until their usual hour, they dressed and ate breakfast so quickly that it was barely half-past eight when they were climbing the front steps of the store, with Duckfoot padding at their heels. Uncle Willie had an early customer, so they had to pretend to be studying the contents of the candy counter until she left.

Finally the screen door swung behind her, and Uncle Willie said cheerfully, "Good morning. And how's the generator coming? No, I

will not offer you any candy at this hour of the morning."

"We're not interested in candy," Bill returned loftily. "You're *not*? Aren't you feeling well? I never-" The boys walked over to the counter where Uncle Willie was lounging, and Bill lowered his voice solemnly. "We have to talk to you about Slim. And it has to be a secret." "Oh? What's up? Did you find out Slim was going to have a birthday, and you want to buy him something-on credit?" Uncle Willie reached over behind the flour bin where he kept an emergency supply of snacks and absent-mindedly extracted a chocolate bar. He unwrapped it and offered it to the boys.

"Now look, Uncle Willie," Roger said, "this is serious. You have to stop eating for a while."

But Bill had accepted a piece of the chocolate. "We can eat and talk at the same time," he pointed out reasonably, putting part of it in his mouth and dropping the other part to Duckfoot, who caught it expertly before it fell.

"Well, all right." Roger condescended to take a piece, too, but he didn't allow the stern set of his features to relax. "You're not going to take this so lightly when you find out what it is," he told his uncle. "Especially since you're responsible for letting him come out here."

Uncle Willie stopped smiling, settled himself more comfortably against the counter, and said, "All right. I'm ready. Let's have it."

As briefly as he could, without omitting any essential details, Roger related the saga of his mounting suspicions of Slim, from the moment when he himself had discovered how heavy were the bags which Slim carried so easily, through the discovery of the deceptive-looking car, the automatic in his drawer, the telegram which was never sent but which nevertheless brought the generator to Seaview in such a hurry, to the story of the mysterious visitor of the night before, and Slim's reference to Smugglers' Island.

"There!" he finished dramatically. "What do you think of all that? Does he sound like a smuggler to you-or doesn't he?"

Uncle Willie looked at him soberly for a moment, and then he turned to Bill. "You agree with all this?"

"Well, at first I thought Rog was sort of imagining things," Bill admitted. "But after last night-gee, *anybody* would have thought that was funny. I mean, if Slim had somebody there who was all right, why

didn't he bring him out and introduce him to us?"

"Um-hmm," Uncle Willie said slowly. "I see your point, of course. And what do you expect to do about it?"

"We thought you'd do something," Roger said.

"Me? And what do you want me to do?"

"Why, tell the police. I know Slim seems pretty nice, but if he's really a criminal-well, it's your duty, isn't it?"

"It could be. But what am I supposed to tell them? That Slim isn't as sick as he looks? That his car isn't as old as *it* looks? That he had company last night? There's no law against those things, you know." Uncle Willie grinned at them, but Roger could tell by the look in his eyes that he was taking it all more seriously than he wanted them to know.

"I guess they wouldn't arrest him right off for any of the things we told you about," Roger said, "but don't you think they'd want to check up on him if they knew about them?"

"I guess maybe they would," Uncle Willie nodded. "And they'd probably make quite a nuisance of themselves while they were doing it. Slim might even get annoyed and move away-and then you'd lose the cottage rent. Did you ever think of that? Or-" his eyes narrowed-"is that what you want to happen? Do you just want to get rid of Slim?"

Roger squirmed slightly under his uncle's scrutiny. "Well, I guess in the beginning I did sort of wish he'd go away. It was fun having the cottage to ourselves. But now -gee, now you have to admit there's something fishy about the whole business. Don't you?"

Uncle Willie answered slowly. "I admit that a couple of imaginative boys could see something fishy in it all, but if you want my advice, here it is: forget the whole thing."

"What!"

"Yep, forget it. You've got a lot of suspicions, but if you go over your story carefully, you'll see that's all they are. There isn't one fact in the lot that proves there's anything to worry about."

"But-but suppose he's a dangerous criminal? D'you want him to be at large around here if he is?" Bill spluttered.

Roger's lips tightened. "All right. If that's the way you feel about it, Uncle Willie, we'll just have to handle this thing alone."

"Now wait a minute," Uncle said quickly. "What do you *mean-handle?*"

"We'll go tell Pete Brown ourselves."

Uncle Willie groaned. "Not Pete Brown. Ever since he took that fingerprint course by mail, he's been looking for an excuse to practice. He'd have everybody in Seaview fingerprinted before we could stop him-and the whole town would be up in arms."

"Well, he's the only policeman we've got around here, so he'll have to do." Roger sounded defiant.

Uncle Willie stared at him a moment, and then he said, "I tell you what: why don't you talk it over with Slim yourselves-give him a chance to explain?"

"No, sir," Roger said quickly. "He'd explain it, all right-anybody can see he's smart, and he could probably explain anything. And if we didn't believe him-and we probably wouldn't-and then we went to the police, why we'd have given Slim a chance to cover up-maybe even to run away."

The screen door of the store squeaked open, and a cheerful voice said, "Who's running away? Not you two-before the generator is done?" And a moment later a grinning Slim had joined them at the counter. They had all been so engrossed in their conversation that they hadn't heard his car drive up, or Slim's steps on the porch.

For a long moment the boys stared at him, and then they turned to their uncle. They were just in time to see a pair of bushy gray eyebrows quickly lowered, as if in some kind of signal; but what kind it was they didn't know. They were, in fact, so confused for an instant that they didn't know much of anything.

Then Roger pulled himself together.

"Well, I guess we'd better be getting home, Uncle Willie," he said, in an unnaturally loud voice. "We-uh- we'll be up later, Slim. Right now we have to-"

He started to edge away, and Bill clung close behind him. But Uncle Willie's peremptory voice stopped them both.

"No, you don't. Come back here, both of you."

"Say, what's going on here?" Slim demanded. "Have I interrupted a family conference?"

"It wasn't anything," Bill said quickly. "Uncle Willie, we have to go now. Honest. We-"

"I said to stand where you are." Uncle Willie wasn't lounging against the counter now, and he looked much taller than usual. "Yes, it's a conference, Slim. But it's not strictly family. In my opinion you ought to be in on it. The fact of the matter is, these two nephews of mine- I warned you about them from the start, if you remember -well, they think you're up to no good. They think they've built up quite a suspicious-sounding case against you, and they want to take it to the police. I thought maybe you'd better hear about it yourself first."

Roger and Bill glared at him with speechless rage. It was the first time Uncle Willie had ever really betrayed them.

"I see," Slim said easily. "What's the case?"

Neither of the boys answered. They just shifted their gaze from Uncle Willie to the floor, and kept it there in stubborn silence.

"Don't I even get a chance to defend myself?" Slim asked.

"Well? Cat got your tongue?" Uncle Willie demanded. "Come on-speak up. You talked enough a few minutes ago. Now you can talk some more."

Roger clenched his fists and lifted his eyes. All right. He'd tell Mr. Robert Slim Warner just what he knew about him. He could feel Bill beginning to cJge carefully away, and he reached out a hand to drag him back. He wasn't going to let everybody desert him right at this crucial moment.

"In the first place, if you want to know," he said, "you're supposed to be sick. But you picked up those heavy bags, two at a time. And I could hardly carry one. And I'm pretty strong," he added quickly.

"Yes, you are." Slim nodded as if in perfect agreement. "I shouldn't have done that. In fact-" he smiled in a funny way-"I'd been particularly warned against things like that. What else?"

Roger's jaw tightened. He'd known Slim was going to be smart at

this kind of thing. He'd told Uncle Willie he'd be good at talking himself out of trouble. But there was plenty more to come.

"And you've got an old wreck of a car, but the motor in it sounds almost brand-new," he continued.

"You noticed that?" Slim looked surprised and Roger could feel his breath coming a little faster, in triumph.

"Sure I noticed it. And I noticed about the telegram, too. You didn't send any-but that generator arrived just the same."

"I told you," Uncle Willie said softly. "They've got about a thousand eyes each. They're like flies."

Roger ignored him. He was waiting to see what answer Slim would have for that one. For an instant a crazy thought flashed through his head that maybe Uncle Willie was in this-this whatever-it-was-with Slim; but that idea was too big and too frightening even to think about.

"We know you didn't send any. We checked up on you," he insisted.

"I thought you'd be so happy to get a good generator that it wouldn't occur to you to ask any questions about it," Slim said surprisingly.

Roger's chest swelled. Slim was practically admitting that-he stole a victorious glance at his uncle and hurried on, to press his advantage.

"And then there was that visitor you had last night," he said. He had been on the point of mentioning the automatic, but had decided that that would sound a little strange. He himself would have had no way of knowing about the gun if he hadn't been snooping. And although, of course, under the circumstances it had all been for the best, still-

"Visitor?" Slim repeated.

"Sure." Bill spoke up suddenly, emboldened by Roger's success. "We heard you talking to somebody when we came up to deliver that telegram. But when we got in you pretended there was nobody there. So we knew it must have been somebody you had to hide." "I see." Slim looked very serious. "Is that all?" Roger thought once more of the automatic, and shoved the idea out of his mind. "That'll do for a start,"

he said grimly. "Don't you think it's about time *he* does some talking now, Uncle Willie?"

Uncle Willie looked serious too. "I-uh-I'm afraid it is. How about it, Slim? What are you going to say for yourself?"

The two men looked at each other a moment, and suddenly Slim grinned. "You're right about the thousand eyes," he said. "It beats me."

"Maybe if you want to clear out, they'd be willing to drop the whole thing?" Uncle Willie said then. "Maybe that would be the best idea."

Roger stared at him. Here he'd heard Slim practically admit that he was-well, something he shouldn't be-and Uncle Willie was willing to let him get away. But before he could state that they wouldn't be willing to drop it, whatever Slim did, Slim spoke himself.

"No," he said. "I don't think I'll clear out. This may make things a little more difficult, of course. But on the other hand, it might make them easier. If they're capable of detective work like that-" He paused to reach into his pocket.

Roger opened his mouth. If Slim was going to offer to take them into his partnership-well, he'd just find out they couldn't be bribed, that's all. And to think that Uncle Willie must have known something about him all this time, and not said a word.

"You can't-" he began loudly.

But Slim stopped him by thrusting something into his hand. It was a leather wallet, opened to one of the center leaves.

"Look at that-both of you," Slim said quietly.

"What is it?" Bill demanded, leaning over so he could see.

Roger was staring, speechless, at a small card under a transparent cover.

"Are you a detective?" Bill asked finally, his voice a high squeak.

Roger felt as if he'd just dropped about fifty stories in a very fast elevator.

"He's a government man," he said slowly.

CHAPTER SIX

Roger could feel the counter quiver under the weight of Uncle Willie's silent chuckles. And, too, he could feel the hot wave crawling up his neck and spreading out over his face. He knew he must be getting red as a beet.

But it served him right. Boy, what a fool he'd made of himself! Everything was clear now. Uncle Willie had known all about Slim the whole time; Uncle Willie used to be a lawyer, of course, so it all fitted in. That's why he'd tried to get the boys to forget their suspicions. But no-Roger had been too smart. He'd said he'd go right to the police. And he'd meant it, too. If Slim hadn't just happened to come in right then-

For a moment he was struck with panic at the thought of the narrow escape he'd had. What did they do to people who obstructed the work of government men, anyway? He didn't know, but he supposed it was something awful.

Finally he forced himself to look up from the card and meet Slim's eyes.

"Gee!" he said. "I didn't know. I sure am glad I was wrong, but-" And he was. In spite of his pride over the way he'd been fitting things together so neatly, he had found himself sorrier and sorrier to have to suspect Slim of some dark deed. "But I guess I've been an awful dope."

"On the contrary," Slim said easily, "I think you've been pretty smart."

For a split second Roger thought Slim was making fun of him, but then he knew he wasn't. And although he felt a little better-after all, if a government detective said you were smart, then you must be-still he forced himself to go on with his confession.

"I was really going to tell the police I thought you were a smuggler," he muttered.

"I was, too," Bill added, honestly.

"A smuggler!" Slim echoed.

"Yeah." Roger waited for him to laugh, but no sound came. And when he looked up he saw Slim and Uncle Willie exchanging glances.

Uncle Willie was chuckling again. "Yes, a smuggler," he repeated. "I guess we forgot to mention the climax of their suspicions."

Slim laughed then too, quietly. "Well, what do you know!" And then he took a deep breath, and when he spoke again he sounded very solemn. "May we use your back room for a while, Uncle Willie? I think it's about time we put our cards on the table."

"Now wait a minute, Slim." Uncle Willie leaned forward in his excitement. "This stuff is nothing for kids to play with."

"What isn't?" Bill demanded. The conversation between the two men was growing more and more confusing.

But Slim ignored them both a moment longer. "I know it isn't," he said to Uncle Willie. "But I have a hunch the boys know the difference between play and work as well as we do."

Uncle Willie looked at him, and then he turned to stare soberly at the puzzled, expectant faces of Roger and Bill. "All right," he said. "I suppose there's nothing else to do now anyway-except quit. And you can't very well do that."

"No, I can't. Come on, then." And Slim started for the back of the store."

"Wait a minute." Uncle Willie reached under the counter and took out a sign which said out to lunch. "Hang it on the door and lock up the place," he told Roger.

"But-it isn't lunch time yet," Bill pointed out, as his brother moved away.

Uncle Willie winked at him. "There are certain advantages in having a reputation for being a big-and constant-eater," he said. "People in Seaview wouldn't be surprised if I had that sign out there all day."

A few moments later the four of them were settling down on packing cases in the little back storeroom, and Slim was pulling a folded paper out of his pocket. When he spread it out on top of a pile of flour bags they could see that it was a map.

"Now." Slim looked at them over it, and waited until both the boys lifted their eyes to his. "I'm going to tell you what I'm here for-what my job is," he said slowly. "And I'm trusting you to keep every word I say an absolute secret. Okay?"

"Yes, sir," Roger breathed. "Yes, sir," Bill agreed.

Roger just had time to think that this was probably the most exciting moment of his life, before Slim went on again.

"Good." He nodded, satisfied. "It was your suspicions of me as a smuggler that made up my mind. Smuggling is my business. Or, rather-it's somebody else's business, and it's my job to find out whose."

"You mean there really are smugglers in Seaview?" Roger's voice was a low, impressed whisper.

"Gee!" Bill muttered.

"I wouldn't be surprised." Slim grinned, briefly. "However, that's getting ahead with the story. Let's start at the beginning. Here-look at this." He turned the map around to face them.

"That's us!" Roger said a moment later. "I mean- there's Seaview," and he pointed with his finger.

"And there's the inlet and the islands and the coastguard station," Bill was pointing, too. "Gosh-even our house is on here-and the cottage!"

"What's that?" Roger asked, indicating a red cross marked on the area of the map near the words atlantic ocean.

"That's where we think our story begins," Slim answered. "We're not sure yet, but we think that's the spot."

"But what's the story?" Bill begged. "What's it all mean?"

"It means trouble," Slim said. "Right now it's trouble for me and my department. But soon, I hope, it'll mean trouble for some other people."

"Who?"

"If he knew that, there wouldn't be any trouble," Uncle Willie pointed out. "Now keep quiet, both of you, and let Slim talk."

"Well, six weeks ago," Slim began, "one of the coastguard boats picked up a peculiar-looking bottle floating around just outside the inlet. The glass was about three times as thick as the glass in an ordinary soda-pop bottle, and the thing was about twice as big. It was sealed with a cork, and there was a heavy layer of lead foil wrapped around it to keep the cork in and to make the bottle watertight. When the bottle was opened-they had to break it-they found a brass tube inside, and a little flashlight which, we later discovered, would ordinarily burn for about twenty hours. The tube itself was soldered and had to be cut open. Inside *it* they found a lot of absorbent cotton wrapped around eight little things that might have been bits of glass. But they weren't. They were diamonds. And at the present market value they were worth about \$25,000."

"Whew!" Roger let out the breath he had been holding in a long low whistle.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" Bill repeated. "But where'd they come from? Whose were they?"

"We wish we knew," Slim said ruefully.

"Couldn't you advertise and find out?" Bill suggested.

"Don't be a chump," Roger told him disgustedly. "They were being smuggled in. No smuggler would answer an ad."

"Oh, sure." Bill grinned sheepishly. "I forgot."

"Forgot! You didn't even know."

"I guess I knew as much as you did."

'Quiet!' Uncle Willie said. "Let's get on with this."

"Well, we assume they were being smuggled in-or that that had been the idea," Slim went on, "although of course we can't be absolutely certain. But in the first place, no one throws expensive diamonds into the ocean unless he knows-or believes-that someone is going to pick them up. And that flashlight looked as if somebody was trying to make the job of picking the bottle up as easy as possible.

"Now we know there's been a fairly constant trickle of smuggled gems coming into the country for some time, and we've been looking for a likely spot of entry. Recently we settled on this locality as a possibility. The main shipping lane to the New York harbor is about

eighteen miles off shore here, and eighteen miles is not too great a distance for a small boat to make-especially if the man running the boat knew there were several thousand dollars' worth of jewels waiting for him at the end of the trip. And then we did some checking of the tides and currents around here, and we found that a bottle dropped in the ocean where that cross is on the map-and the cross is in the shipping lane-would eventually land at the place where this one was found.

"So-" He leaned back and spoke more slowly. "Our working premise at the moment is this: that someone-or more than one person-is taking jewels out of Europe, or maybe South America or Africa, for all we know, and dropping them out of a porthole of a ship when the ship reaches a prearranged spot. And then somebody else goes out to that spot shortly afterward and, guided by the light in the bottle, picks them up. Do you follow me?" Both the boys nodded solemnly.

And then Roger asked, "But how did that bottle get found by the coast guard? If it was supposed to be picked up, why wasn't it?"

"And how'd you happen to get suspicious of Seaview?" Bill wanted to know. "There are other places where the shipping lanes come close to shore, aren't there?"

"To answer Roger first," Slim said, "I'll have to admit that we only have a theory on that. We don't really know yet. But when we found out where a bottle would have to be dropped into the water to wind up eventually at the inlet, we tried it ourselves. We went out and dropped one there. And it took three days for it to get in. So we figured back three days from the date the coast guard found the real bottle, and discovered that that had been the day a little hurricane blew up suddenly. Do you remember it-several weeks ago?"

"Sure." Both the boys nodded.

"Well," Slim continued, "we *think* that the bottle was dropped overboard from the *Atlantis*, the big liner that went through that night. And we think that before it could be picked up, the squall somehow upset the plans of the confederate on shore. Furthermore, the battery of that particular flashlight appeared to be defective, so it probably didn't last as long as it was supposed to. So it looks as if the smugglers just had bad luck that time.

"And now for your question, Bill." He swung around. "It's probably been pretty well answered already. Seaview is the nearest place to

that cross on the map. The only other place near by, which small boats could put out from, is Deepwater, almost twenty miles farther south. Investigations are going on there, too, as a matter of tact; but in my opinion Seaview is the more likely possibility."

"But," Uncle Willie put in, "Seaview is a small town, and it doesn't attract a summer population, so any stranger here would be conspicuous. But if a detective is conspicuous, he's no good. So Slim got me to help cook up this story about him having to recuperate from an operation. I'd spread it around pretty well, and everybody seemed to believe it-until you two came along with your snooping and upset the whole thing."

"But Uncle Willie," Roger said quickly, "we won't upset anything. We won't say a word. We'll go right along as if Slim was really out here for his health. Except that now we can help him, of course."

"That's just what I thought you had in mind," Uncle Willie said sternly. "And that's what worries me. Now look, if there *are* any smugglers around here, and if they get wind of what Slim is, they'll probably take steps to do away with him. And if they think you know about them, they'll take steps about that, too. So I want you to stay away from the cottage from now on. D'you hear me?"

"But, Uncle Willie," Roger got up and stood before his uncle, "we can't do that. Don't you see? People already know we're building a generator up there. If we stop now, it *would* look suspicious. But if we go right on, as if nothing had happened, and not say a word to anybody about what we know-well, then it will be all right. And we won't talk. Honest."

"Of course we won't," Bill added.

"They're right, you know, Willie," Slim said, lighting his pipe carefully. "I'm mighty sorry this happened. I'm as concerned for the boys' safety as you are. But as long as it has happened-well, I think we ought to go on just as we have been doing. I believe we can trust them, first, not to talk; and, second, not to go off on any snooping of their own. Can't we?" He looked at them very solemnly, and the little storeroom was quiet.

"Yes, sir," Roger said, as he had once earlier that morning.

"Yes, sir," Bill repeated.

"And maybe there will be things we can do for you anyway,"

Roger added. "I don't mean crazy things-I just mean, keeping our eyes open, and telling you anything we notice that looks strange. We know everybody around here, and they're all used to having us hanging around and asking questions and stuff."

"There might be at that," Slim nodded. "But remember, this isn't a game. This is serious business. And I don't want you doing any hanging around or any question-asking that you haven't discussed with me first. All right?"

"Yes, sir," both the boys said once more.

"If your mother finds out about this-" Uncle Willie groaned.

"She won't," Roger assured him. "She'd only worry if we told her, so we won't. After all, you were willing to have Slim come out here in the first place-and nothing's changed since then, really. Anyhow, we'll act as if it hasn't."

"You'd better," Uncle Willie muttered.

"Now." Slim sat up briskly. "The first thing we have to do is to get that generator going. It'll be a great help to me once it's finished. It'll save me from having to take my batteries down to be charged every couple of days." He grinned suddenly. "I forgot to tell you: that was my visitor -the radio I use to communicate with headquarters. And that's how I managed to get that generator down here so quickly-I told them over the radio what I wanted."

Roger grinned too. "Well, I knew you never sent a telegram."

"Shall we get on up to the cottage then?" Slim suggested.

"Yes, you should," Uncle Willie said tartly. "If I don't open up this store eventually somebody might get suspicious of *me*, appetite or no appetite, And remember now, you two-don't even talk to each other about this business anywhere where you might be overheard."

"We won't," Roger assured him. "You'd better go home in your car, Slim," he went on, "and we'll come up on our bikes the way we always do."

"Right. That's the program-business strictly as usual."

Slim departed, and the boys waited a little while longer in the back room before they went after him.

"You know, you're the one who'll probably get us in trouble-if anybody does," Roger told Bill.

"Me! Well, I like that!"

"Yes, you-with those wise remarks you're always making. Anyhow, you seem to think they're wise. But the first one you pull about this stuff in front of Mom-" He glared threateningly.

"I won't pull any. I promise. No more wisecracks until we crack this case."

"You see? There you go again."

"Well, that's the last one. Cross my heart."

* * *

When Slim opened the door for them a little while later, he motioned them to follow him into the bedroom.

"Might as well let you in on this right away," he said, "so you won't be tempted to find out about it for yourselves."

He moved the two still-unpacked suitcases to the middle of the room, and unlocked them with a key from his key ring. When the covers were lifted the boys saw the maze of dials and meters and wires inside, and they watched curiously as Slim plugged wires from one case into the other, and flipped several switches. Then he put a pair of earphones over his head, moved a dial carefully, and seemed to be listening. In a moment his expression changed.

He turned another switch and, speaking into a small microphone he took from one of the cases, said quietly, "One-one-nine. Mustard. One-one-nine. Mustard. Come in." He flipped the same switch again, waited, flipped it back, and spoke once more. "Right. Everything arrived. Proceeding with installation. Situation slightly altered here, but will continue."

Once more he listened.

"No. Will explain at meeting. Usual place, usual time. Right. Move setting up to position four. Be seeing you. So long."

And a moment later he had replaced the microphone and the headphones in the case, disconnected the wires, and closed and locked

both bags.

"Simple, isn't it?" he grinned at the boys, who were watching him wide-eyed.

"What did it all mean?" Bill asked.

"Couldn't you understand me?"

"Part of it. I guess 'situation altered' means us, huh?"

Slim nodded.

"But what does 'move setting' mean?"

"We have a whole series of different wave lengths for our communications," Slim explained. "You see, other people have short-wave radios, too, but .if we shift our length constantly we can be pretty sure nobody listens in on us-not more than once, anyhow."

"You could use a code, couldn't you?"

"Sure. And sometimes we do, but it's simpler this way. We don't say more than we have to, so even if we were overheard we wouldn't make much sense. Now let's get to work-and I'll answer the rest of your questions some other time."

"Okay."

They watched Slim put the bags back into the corner, and then they followed him into the workroom.

"We stopped at the house and brought the varnish up with us," Roger explained. "So I could start varnishing right away. You and Bill were going to get the tower set up on the roof, and work out the sliding contacts."

"Right. That's a good schedule. Let's just get this box unpacked first, and see what they sent up."

He crossed to the carton that had arrived the night before, and loosened the ropes around it. Inside was the generator which the boys had already caught a glimpse of, and in addition there was a coil of heavy rubber-covered wire, and two small boxes. One of them contained screws, small j3arts, copper disks and rings of various sizes and some springy brass strips. The other one held small sockets and a half-dozen automobile lamps.-"Those are for the lights in the house, I

guess," Slim said, putting down the last items. And then he saw a note in the bottom of the box.

" 'Dear Slim,' " he read aloud, " 'I think you'll have everything but the storage battery. That was too heavy to send, and anyway you can probably buy one at Seaview. Hope you have a lot of fun and feel better soon. Ed.' " Slim dropped the note on the table. "Well, that's that. He came through pretty nicely, didn't he? And I'll get a battery this afternoon."

"Is Ed really your brother?" Roger asked.

"He really is," Slim laughed. "That's one thing I wasn't lying about. He does the same kind of work I do, and that's why he's in on this."

"It's too bad about the battery, isn't it?" Bill said sadly. "If you buy one from Mr. Jenkins, everybody in town will know about it in ten minutes."

"And that's just what we want," Slim told him. "We *want* everybody to know we're building a generator. Remember?"

"Oh, sure. Sure, I get it."

"I should think you would, by this time," Roger told him disgustedly.

"Come on, now. Let's get going," Slim said.

"But when are you going to tell us how you work on a case like this-what you do first, and all?" Bill wanted to know. But Slim only grinned, and headed him for the door.

"What we have to do first and right now is get to work on that tower," he said. "You'll learn all you have to, but there's a time and a place for everything."

CHAPTER SEVEN

They got in about three hours of work before lunch time. Roger gave the blades a thin coat of varnish and then went out to help Slim and Bill with the tower construction. Just before noon he sanded the blades again and gave them a second coat. By that time the tower was

almost finished, and ready for mounting. When the rotating platform was done, with its sliding contacts, they could mount the apparatus on the roof, run the wires down into the house, and test it out.

"We could have this thing almost finished by tonight if we wanted to," Roger pointed out.

"I suppose we could," Slim agreed. "But I think we'd better take at least part of the afternoon off to go fishing."

"Yeah. I guess so." Roger nodded. "Any special place?"

Slim laughed. "Sure. Where there's some fish. I tell you what: let's work on this thing again after lunch-say, until three-thirty or so-and then go out in the boat."

"All right," Roger said. "Come on, Bill. We have to go home to lunch. We'll come back as soon as we've finished, Slim."

"Good."

"All I can say is," Bill muttered as they coasted downhill toward the Baxter house, "that going fishing at a time like this is goofy. We'll have plenty of time to fish after the generator is working."

"That probably is all you can say," Roger agreed pointedly, "because that's as far as you can think. Can't you get it through your head that Slim's here for a vacation-and that he has to act like it? Remember now-no smart remarks."

They got a good amount accomplished, however, by three-thirty. They set the tower up on the roof, and got the revolving platform in place temporarily to see how it worked. It worked fine. The broad tail caught the wind and swung the platform on its roller-skate wheels back and forth with no effort. And the sliding contacts too seemed to be doing their job.

"Looks good to me," Slim nodded, satisfied. "Of course we won't really be able to judge it until the generator is charging. The contacts should be so good that they don't spark."

"We'll be able to tell by the ammeter," Roger said, "whether the current is being delivered to the battery smoothly, or whether the contacts are so bad that it's interrupted."

"I knew I forgot something!" Slim exclaimed. "An ammeter."

"We've got one," Bill told him. "It's from an old car, too."

"We ought to erect a monument to that old car of yours," Slim grinned.

"We've got a relay, too," Roger put in. "And we'll need that to stop the electricity in the battery from running backwards and turning the generator like a motor when the wind's not blowing."

"Swell. Better and better. And now let's fish."

Laden with a jar of worms, some handlines and a bag of cookies, the three of them made their way to the row-boat a little later, followed, as usual, by Duckfoot. Roger and Bill took the oars and pulled out into the bay.

"Where's the best fishing?" Slim asked.

"We'll go past the islands and get near the marshes on the other side of the bay," Roger explained. "There's a channel there that the fish seem to like."

When they were almost at their destination, a speedboat roared out of the cove on Smugglers' Island and set out for town, leaving a froth of white water behind it. But when Mr. Clyde, at the throttle, caught sight of them, he changed his course, and swung around. His motor's roar died to a purr when he was within hailing distance.

"Hi," he called cheerfully, waving a hand. "Thought you might want to know there seems to be a lot of weak-fish running out in the inlet."

"Thanks. But we're taking it easy today." Slim held up his handline. "The boys thought we might pick up some fluke around here, and that would do me fine."

"Good enough. But if you've got a rod you might like to fish off the rocks at the east end of my island some time. You're welcome to try it, any day you like."

"Thanks a lot. That sounds like real sport. I'll take you up on it one of these days."

Mr. Clyde waved again, said "Good luck," and eased his boat around. When he was some distance off, he opened the throttle and the boat streaked for the town dock.

Slim watched it disappear through narrowed eyes.

"A boat like that," he mused, "could make eighteen miles without much trouble."

"You don't think-I" Roger's eyes widened.

"I don't think anything," Slim replied. "All I'm doing is making an observation."

"Oh." And a few minutes later Roger added, "We might try here first." He crawled to the bow and dropped the anchor overboard. Then he laid the oars down in the bottom of the boat, opened up the jar of worms and began to bait the hooks.

Duckfoot looked into the water longingly.

"No, you don't," Bill told him. "You'll scare the fish away. Stay where you are."

So Duckfoot sat down again resignedly, stretched out on the seat and went to sleep.

When they had their lines out, Slim spoke. "Voices carry a long way over water, so I'll keep this quiet. But there are a lot of things I'd like to talk over with you, and some questions I think maybe you can answer."

The boys turned toward him excitedly, and Bill didn't even notice that there was a pull on his line until Slim pointed that fact out to him. Then he hauled it in and a crab flopped into the bottom of the boat. Duckfoot opened one eye, saw what it was, and edged away. Duckfoot had had several unpleasant encounters with crabs, and had finally learned to let them alone. Roger picked this one up and threw it back, and Bill rebaited his line and tossed it over again.

"Okay," he said. "We're ready now." "Well, as you've probably realized already," Slim said quietly, "we don't know very much yet. All we have so far is a bottle and a lot of fine theories. We're assuming, of course, that whoever is supposed to pick up those bottles must have a boat. That, at least, seems a fairly safe theory to work on. Furthermore, the boat must be accessible to the ocean, and big enough to go out some distance and come back safely."

"Well, gee whiz!" Bill exploded. And then he remembered to lower his voice. "I mean," he went on softly, "that's not much help. There are

about fifty boats in the bay around here."

"I know." Slim nodded. "And I'm counting on you to help me out about them. I want you to list them all for me, with their owners; tell me what kind of boats they are, what they're used for, and anything else you can think of that might be valuable."

Roger looked thoughtful. "It really isn't as bad as Bill says," he pointed out. "I mean, there are about fifty boats around here, all right, but a lot of them are rowboats or little sailboats or other small things that couldn't be used for any kind of a longish trip."

Slim jerked in his line rapidly and a fluke flapped into the bottom of the boat.

"That's a good one," Bill said, unhooking him. "Must be almost a foot long."

Slim looked pleased. "No, he's not bad, is he? I guess I'll eat tonight after all." He dropped his line over again. "Okay, then. You say we can eliminate some of them right away. How many boats are there that could make the sort of trip we have in mind?"

"Well, there are all the fishing boats-the regular fishing boats, I mean," Roger told him slowly. "There must be about fifteen of them around. By the time we get back they'll all be in at the town dock, if you want to see them."

"And what about some of the crabbing and clamming boats?" Bill suggested. "They're big enough to go outside the inlet. We've seen them do it."

"Sure we have-in the daytime," his brother reminded him. "But who'd take them out at night? They don't even have running lights."

"That's probably no drawback," Slim pointed out. "A smuggler would be almost sure *not* to use running lights. He'd have to get past the coast-guard station, don't forget, and he wouldn't want to be noticed."

"That's right," Roger nodded. And then he sat up straight. "But say-wouldn't the coast guard hear a boat go past anyway? The inlet is only about half a mile wide there, and you could hear any kind of a motorboat easily at that distance."

Slim smiled wryly. "And there you have another one of the things

that are bothering us. On the night that the *Atlantus* went by there was a storm, you remember, so the coast guard was keeping a particularly careful lookout. And the men there neither heard nor saw any boat leaving the inlet until the fishing boats went out at three in the morning. So: if our boat went out at all, it was either a fishing boat, or it somehow managed to get past the station, both silently and invisibly. Of course the slip-up may have happened because the boat couldn't go out at all that night. And none of that gets us very far. Are there any boats around here so silent that they could get out of the inlet without being heard?"

"Maybe the smugglers have a submarine," Bill suggested.

"I'd say that was possible but not probable," Slim grinned.

Roger was concentrating. "If any of the fishing boats had tried to sneak out before three o'clock, I should think they'd have been heard. They're all diesel-powered, and they don't really make a loud noise, but that dull throbbing sound carries a long way. Of course, a boat like Mr. Clyde's speedboat can be pretty silent if it's just crawling along."

"You could hear it at night, though," Bill put in. "Remember, we've even heard voices from Smugglers' Island at night, and our cottage is more than half a mile from there."

"Then it sounds as if one of the fishing boats is our best possibility," Slim said slowly. "Unless, of course, the scheduled boat didn't go out that night at all."

"Or maybe it went out, but nobody heard it because it was being rowed," Bill suggested.

"Are you crazy?" Roger stared. "D'you know how long it takes to row a boat eighteen miles and back?"

"I didn't mean they rowed it the whole way," Bill answered defensively. "But suppose they rowed out a couple of miles-far enough so when they started a motor the coast guard couldn't hear it? Then they could look around for the bottle, and come back with the motor going until they got near the inlet again, and then row the rest of the way. What about that?"

"Any boat safe for that long a trip is too big to row," Roger declared.

"It is not." Bill was getting excited. "What about Pop Tompkin's dory? He takes that way out sometimes, and he rows it."

Slim had been listening quietly. "Maybe you've got something, Bill," he said. "Suppose someone has a dory that could be rowed out past the inlet. And suppose he has a good outboard motor that he could attach after he got a couple of miles out. How would that be?"

"You can hear outboard motors five miles at night," Roger said.

"Yes, I suppose so." Slim thought a moment. "But suppose the dory had an inboard with an underwater exhaust? What about that?"

"That would do it." Even Roger began to look convinced, but only for a moment. "Nope. No good. None of the dories around here have inboards. We've seen all of them, and we know."

"That's right, Slim," Bill agreed reluctantly. "I guess it wasn't such a good idea at that."

"Could you row a speedboat like Mr. Clyde's?" Slim asked.

"Sure. Two men could, easy."

"Well, then." Slim lowered his voice another degree. "If the smugglers have a high-powered, low-muffled boat like Mr. Clyde's, you think they could row it out past the coast-guard station, and back in again. Right?"

"They could." Roger nodded. "But if that's what happened, then your case is solved. The only speedboat around here is Mr. Clyde's."

"But that's silly," Bill pointed out. "A rich man like Mr. Clyde isn't going to mess around with smuggling." "Unless that's how he got rich," Slim grinned. "Oh. Yeah. I didn't think of that. But look: we can tell by seeing a boat whether it's ever been rowed or not. You have to have some kind of oarlocks to row with, and even if they took them off the boat when they didn't need them, there'd be some kind of mark left from them."

"And how do you know there aren't marks like that on Mr. Clyde's boat?"

"I never saw any. Did you, Rog?"

"No." Roger shook his head. "But then I never really looked, I

guess. We could find out, though. We can call to him when he comes back from town, and get close enough to see. Let's row over there now, so we won't miss him. Shall we, Slim?"

"Why not? One fact is worth a lot of theories."

Slim pulled in his line and Bill hauled up the anchor, and a few moments later they were rowing casually toward Smugglers' Island. Soon they heard the one-cylindereed cough of a boat coming up behind them, and they glanced around to see Old Man Tinkham heading for home. When he passed them he glared sternly across the intervening water, and Slim nonchalantly waved.

"If that boat ever went past the coast guard at night, it'd wake them all up," Bill whispered under his breath.

"Looks seaworthy enough to make the trip, though," Slim murmured.

"Maybe the boat is, but I don't think that motor could keep going long enough," Roger said.

"Hurry up," Bill muttered. "I hear Mr. Clyde coming."

They pulled toward the cove on Smugglers' Island, and then slacked off so that Mr. Clyde would have to pass them to get into his boat basin. They could hear the roar of the boat distinctly now, and in a moment it appeared around Crab Island. Mr. Clyde saw the crabber's boat there, and swung around in a wide circle to avoid it, but the wake of the speedboat set the smaller craft to bobbing up and down like a cork. Tinkham shook his fist angrily at his neighbor.

When Clyde pulled up near the rowboat a few seconds later, he smiled ruefully at Slim and the boys.

"Poor old Tinkham," he said. "I tried to avoid that, but I couldn't help it."

"It wasn't your fault," Slim said. "You went way around him."

Clyde shrugged. "He's a crusty old codger. I tried to make friends with him when I nipt came out here, but he wouldn't have any part of me. How was the fishing?"

"Got a pretty good fluke," Slim said. "Thought we might try the other side of your island before we call it a day."

"I'll give you a tow."

"Thanks. That would be fine."

Clyde pulled his boat over closer while Roger untied the mooring line from the anchor. He passed it to Mr. Clyde, who made it fast to the stern of his boat. Then he engaged the clutch and opened the throttle a little. The speedboat moved ahead slowly, the towline grew taut, and the row-boat began to follow. In a very few minutes they were around the island and Mr. Clyde tossed the line back,

"Thanks a lot. It would have taken the boys quite a while to row around here, and I hate to see them working so hard when I'm in no condition to help out," Slim grinned, and they all waved as Mr. Clyde swung around.

"Don't mention it. Good luck-and see you soon, I hope."

"Well?" Slim asked quietly, when the speedboat had disappeared.

"I didn't see any kind of mark that could have been made by oarlocks," Roger told him.

"Neither did I," Bill added.

"Then that's that. At least we've eliminated one boat out of this bay-full."

"Is that all there is to detective work?" Bill asked.

"That's all there is to it," Slim grinned, "even if it isn't always as easy to do as that was. Seriously though, I do want that list I told you about, of every boat that could make the trip, silently or not. I'll send it off to headquarters and let them do a little background work on it, and we may learn something from that. If the owner of any of the boats proves to have a criminal record, we'd have something to work on.

"I realize I can't live up to your idea of a brilliant detective," he went on a moment later, baiting his hook. "That is, I can't go around asking questions all the time, the way detectives do in books. I have to keep as inconspicuous as possible, because if there are smugglers in Seaview they'd simply cease operations here if they thought they were being watched.

"So." He shrugged. And then he lowered his voice. "But I'll tell you

a secret. We always have the co-operation of the foreign police on a matter like this. Police usually have a pretty good idea of who the most active smugglers are, even if they don't have enough evidence to arrest them. So they can probably let us know when a shipment of gems is leaving for this country, and by what boat. When that time comes, we want to have as much information on hand as possible about all the boats around here, so that we can determine which one takes a quiet ride out to sea and comes back with stones in a bottle."

"But if you expect to know *that*," Bill said, wide-eyed, "why can't the coast guard just wait out in the shipping lane and catch any little boat that comes along to pick up the bottle?"

"Because they could throw a bottle back into the ocean as fast as they had picked it up, and then there'd be no evidence," Slim explained. "No, we'd have to let the smuggler take the gems ashore, before we'd have a case. So keep your eyes open, boys, and don't get impatient. This watchful waiting will pay dividends some day.

"And now," he threw his line overboard, "let's apply our detective ability to the tracking down of a few more fluke."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bill guided his bicycle around a hole in the road and the wheels tipped at a sharp angle.

"Look out for that box of parts," Roger warned. "You'll upset it and break the ammeter."

"I *am* looking out."

Both the boys stood on their pedals then to make the last upgrade to the cottage, and when they rounded the bend they saw Slim up on the roof watching their propeller spin in a fresh breeze off the ocean.

"She's a beauty!" he shouted down.

By the time they had set their bikes against the house, he had joined them on the ground.

"She spins in almost no breeze at all," Slim went on. "When I first

got her up there there wasn't even a puff of air, but when this east wind started, so did she. Just look at her!"

They all admired their handiwork for a moment and then Roger asked, "Have you hooked the wires up already?"

"Yep. I ran them down into the house, but I didn't do any more than that because I didn't have the ammeter." He leaned over and glanced into the box Bill had lifted off the bicycle. "I see you brought it. Good. Let's get it right on, and then we can go down to the village and buy a storage battery."

They all trooped into the house, and while Slim fastened the ammeter to the wall near the spot where the wires entered the house, the boys strung wires from the kitchen to their workroom, the bedroom and the living room. They were connecting the last socket when Slim called, "I'm all set. How are you?"

"Just a minute," Roger answered.

"Well, hurry up. I want to see how this thing works."

"But we can't tell yet anyhow." Roger was working as fast as he could to finish the socket.

"Why not?" Slim stuck his head in the door. "The generator is charging, so why can't we light a lamp?"

"Because it might burn the lamp out if it's turning too fast," Roger said. "If there was a battery in the line, it could take up the excess current and protect the lamp, but without a battery a lamp wouldn't last a minute if the wind should suddenly speed up."

"But there's not much wind today," Slim protested. "I'll bet it won't hurt the lamp a bit."

"Okay," Roger grinned. "It's your lamp. But don't say I didn't warn you."

"Let's try it, Slim," Bill urged. "Rog is always worried about something."

"Come on, then." Slim led the way to the kitchen, where he snapped an automobile headlight bulb into the socket that hung from the newly installed wire. Then he put his hand to the switch the boys had mounted on the wall. "Here goes."

He pushed the switch blade in, and the light sprang into brilliance.

"See?" Bill said triumphantly. "It's not burning out."

"It hasn't yet," Roger admitted. "But you two better pray that we don't get a sudden puff of real wind. Because if we do and that generator--"

That was as far as he got, for suddenly the lamp brightened visibly, and, while they were all still blinking in its glare, just as suddenly died.

Slim and Bill looked at each other in silence.

Then Slim said, "I don't want to make any threats, but if a certain person in this room so much as whispers that he told us so, there's going to be trouble."

Roger was laughing. "I'll make a bargain with you," he said finally. "I won't say a thing about it, if you'll tell me what you did with that list of boat owners we gave you last night."

"It's a deal," Slim laughed too, then. "I've just realized that we're even more stupid than you think we are, Rog. I've got a battery right here in the house, if I'd only had the sense to think of it. It's in the radio transmitter. All we have to do is bring it in here and connect the two charging leads. Wait a minute."

He came back into the room an instant later with one of the suitcases from the bedroom, opened it, and took from a little compartment two rubber-covered wires with spring clasps at their ends.

"Here," he said. "This one is marked positive."

"And this is our positive lead, right here," Roger said, taking it. "I'll clip it on the switch blade. Now the other one."

The moment he had the two wires connected, the needle on the ammeter swung over to the charge side and settled.

"Boy!" Bill shouted. "Look at it charging fifteen amps!"

"It's steady, too," Roger said with satisfaction. "That means our sliding contacts are doing their job."

"Now for the battery, and we'll really have electric lights."

"You want to let this thing keep charging?" Roger asked.

"Sure. Why not?" Slim replied. "I've been using it quite a bit lately. It probably needs it."

Just then a sharp sound outside attracted their attention. They all glanced through the window to see Mr. Clyde just closing the door of his car.

Slim's face set. "You two stay here," he ordered. "I'll talk to him outside. We don't want anyone to see this transmitter."

As the door closed behind him, Roger and Bill exchanged glances. "Keep quiet," Roger muttered, and Bill nodded.

"Hello!" they heard Slim say. "Glad you found your way up here."

"Thanks. Quite a climb, even for a good car, but it's worth it for a view like this."

"Not bad, is it? Want to walk out on the cliff and see it better?"

"Thanks, no. Not this time. As a matter of fact, it wasn't the view that brought me up here. I heard down in the village that you and the Baxter boys were installing a wind generator, and I wanted to take a look at it. I generate my own electricity, you know, and it occurred to me a windmill might be a better idea than the gasoline outfit I have now."

"Hey!" Bill whispered. "He'll want to come in here. What about this thing?" and he pointed to the transmitter on the floor.

"We've got to get it out of the way-and fast," Roger whispered back. He unfastened the clips from the switch and hurriedly coiled the charging leads back into their compartment.

"It's not finished yet," Slim said, and the boys realized he had raised his voice for their benefit. "I'm afraid the place just looks like a junk pile now. But in a day or so-"

"Nonsense," Mr. Clyde interrupted. "I'm not afraid of a cluttered workshop. Where is it?"

Between them Roger and Bill lugged the heavy case hastily across the room and shoved it into a closet. They closed the door tightly on

it, and then Roger rushed back and began to loosen the wires at the switch, ripping off the two that led to the generator outside.

"What're you doing?" Bill demanded hoarsely. "You're busting that thing all up!"

"Shh! Here they come!"

The door opened and Slim came in first. His eyes darted to the spot where the transmitter had stood, and he smiled slightly. "How are you doing, boys?" he asked cheerfully. "Mr. Clyde wants to take a look at our system."

"Pretty good. Just got a couple more wires to connect, and then we can test her out." And Roger indicated the two he had just disconnected.

"But, of course, we have to get a battery first," Bill added solemnly, "or we might burn out the bulbs."

"Guess you're right." The corners of Slim's mouth were twitching, but he had his back to Mr. Clyde. "We'll get that this afternoon, and test her out tonight."

"I'm sorry you haven't got her hooked up," Mr. Clyde said. "I'd like to see how she works. I saw the windmill spinning on your roof, and I thought you were all finished."

"Come on up again tomorrow," Slim invited cheerfully.

"I'll try to do that." Mr. Clyde wandered toward the door into the living room. "You certainly have enough space up here for one man," he smiled. "Must be kind of lonely. Unless you're like me and enjoy solitude."

"I don't mind it-although I haven't had a lot, with Roger and Bill around to take me fishing and work on this thing."

Mr. Clyde stood at the window a moment, admiring the view, and then he turned away briskly. "Well, guess I'd better get along. I'll come up again and see how your project works out." "Do that. Any time."

"Whew!" Slim whistled, when he came back into the kitchen after seeing his visitor to his car. "That was a close one! I never felt so relieved in my life as I did when I opened that door and found the transmitter gone." He walked over and inspected the dangling wires.

"I'm sorry about this. I mean-I'm glad you did it, but it's too bad it had to be done. I was wondering if you'd get what I meant when I told him it wasn't finished yet. I was afraid that if he even thought it was nearly done, he'd hang around a while in order to see the completed job. And if he hung around, he might see something I wouldn't want him to."

"I thought Rog had gone crazy when he began tearing those wires down," Bill admitted. "But I came to in time to tell Mr. Clyde we couldn't really start it without a battery," he added proudly.

"I'll say you did. And what a nerve-saying that to *me* after what happened a little while ago," Roger told him.

Bill tried to look insulted, but Slim laughed and after a minute Bill had to laugh, too.

"Well, anyway," he said, "it helped. Though it wouldn't really have been so terrible if it hadn't, would it, Slim? As long as it was Mr. Clyde, I mean. Now that we know his boat doesn't have any oarlocks, he's eliminated, isn't he?"

"Not by a long shot," Slim answered soberly. "It \was his boat we eliminated-not him. The American courts consider a man innocent until he's proved guilty; but detectives have to consider all men as potentially guilty until they're proved innocent. No-he's not eliminated-yet. And even if he were, I wouldn't want him to know about that transmitter. If he did, he might mention it in Seaview, unless I asked him not to-and that would sound suspicious in itself."

He glanced at his watch. "I think I'll give headquarters a buzz, and see what's up, if anything. Where's the transmitter?"

Roger opened the closet door, and they carried the case into the bedroom. Slim himself said little except the necessary words for establishing contact, but he didn't look too pleased over what he heard through the earphones.

When he took them off and shut up the cases again, he said, "Well, let's get cleaned up here and then we'll go down and buy a battery. And this afternoon I want to do a little photography."

"Heck!" Bill sounded disgusted. "First it's fishing and now it's pictures! When are we going to detect? What about that list we gave you?"

"I'm just coming to that. I turned it over to one of the boys last

night-gave him the names of everybody owning boats capable of making the trip. And I just got word that they've all been checked, and none of them have ever run afoul of the law in the past. So any little help we might have had on that is out. But headquarters wants pictures to compare with those in the rogues' gallery, on the chance that somebody on our list is using a false name. So that's why I want to go down to the wharf this afternoon and take pictures of the scenery. And, of course, if we should happen to get some of our suspects in the pictures, that would *not* be purely accidental."

"Now you're talking!" Bill beamed. "We'll bring our camera down, too, so we're sure to get everybody."

"No, you won't," Slim contradicted him. "People won't think it's unusual if I take pictures, because that's the sort of thing strangers are likely to do. But they might wonder if they saw you with a camera—unless you make a habit of doing that sort of thing. Do you?"

"No, we don't," Roger nodded. "You're right. About half-past four would be a good time, Slim. The fishing boats come in then, and the wharf is pretty lively."

"Swell! That's just the hour a visitor would be most likely to hang around then."

"Gosh, we never get a chance to do anything," Bill muttered.

"You've got a chance right now," Slim told him. And when Bill looked up eagerly he added. "A chance to get up on the roof and give the tower a good coat of paint. But watch the propeller, or you'll get knocked down."

"Heck!" But Bill headed for the workroom just the same.

CHAPTER NINE

Slim stopped the car at Uncle Willie's, and Mrs. Baxter got out. ,

"Thanks." She smiled.

"We'll pick you up about five-thirty, if you'd like," Slim offered.

"That's fine. I'll be here."

As Slim released the brake he said casually, for the benefit of several villagers near by, "Let's go down to the dock and take a look around."

"You can drive right on to the dock," Roger said. "Park the car behind the big shed. It won't be in the way there."

The shed he was referring to was the fish-packing house, and the moment they got out of the car they were surrounded by the strong fishy odor that always pervaded the place. The boats were not due for some time yet, but there were already several men at work in the shed, hosing down the cement floor, feeding cakes of ice into the ice-crushing machines, and preparing the packing cases in which the ice-surrounded fish would be sent to the city.

"Come on inside," Bill urged.

They had to blink their eyes a moment to accustom them to the dimness, after the bright sun outside. When they could see clearly again, they made their way toward the platform that hung out over the water. This was where the fishing boats would moor, and cranes would hoist their catch up to the platform for weighing and packing.

"Hi, kids," a friendly voice sang out, and the boys looked around.

"Hello, Chris," Roger said. And when the man came nearer he went on: "We're down here to show Mr. Warner the dock. Slim, this is Chris."

The two men shook hands.

"He wants to take some pictures of the fishing boats coming in," Bill explained.

"It's all right, isn't it?" Slim inquired. "Sure. Why not? But you want to watch out not to fall over the edge. It gets pretty slimy around here when the fish start coming in." He grinned. "Good thing your camera can't photograph smells."

"I don't know. I can't think of a more characteristic souvenir to take back from a vacation at Seaview than a whiff of this place. I suppose fishing isn't very romantic, though, when you do it for a living, is it?" Slim went on casually. "Must be a pretty hard life-especially when the weather's rough."

Chris shrugged. "You take the good with the bad. Most of the

boats around here-the fishing boats, I mean-are tough, though. They'll stand a lot of knocking around." "I suppose the coast guard looks after them pretty well-warns them of storms coming up, for example."

"Oh, sure-not that the fishermen always listen to the warning," Chris added. "If they think they can make it, they'll go out anyway."

"But they can't do much in a bad sea, can they?" Slim asked.

Roger admired the easy half-interested way Slim spoke, as if he really were an ordinary vacationer with an ordinary polite interest in the local customs.

"Well, no." Chris leaned on the railing and took out his pipe. Slim offered him his tobacco pouch and the other man accepted it with a smile. "Thanks. You see, these boats are trawlers, and they're probably the most powerful boats of their size there are. They run along dragging a net behind them, and every so often they pull the net up with winches and spill their catch into the hold. It's a regular business; it's not just a little pleasure jaunt. And in all the years I've been running this packing plant, I haven't seen them miss many nights. If they think it's going to be a short blow, they'd rather ride it out and get back to work when it's over."

He put a match to his pipe. "We had a little freak storm several weeks ago," he said reminiscently. "Coast guard hoisted the warning lights early in the evening, and the storm broke about midnight. But the worst of it was over by three, and all the boats-every one of them-went out that night. They can't afford to worry about little blows, when caution will cost them a day's fishing."

The boys looked at each other and then looked quickly away again, but Slim seemed entirely unconcerned.

"I suppose the warnings are meant mostly for the smaller boats anyway," he said.

"We don't have many small boats around here," Chris told him. "Oh, of course there's the usual number of row-boats and a couple of outboards, and that speedboat of Clvde's. Yeah, I suppose they all take the warnings pretty seriously. Don't get me wrong-the fishermen don't disregard them entirely either. If they really think it's going to be bad, they stay put. But they're likely to think they know as much about it as the coast guard does." He took his arms off the railing. "Well, guess I'd better get to work. The boats'll be in soon. Good luck with the pictures."

"So they all went out that night," Slim said softly after Chris had left them. "Let's see. There were fifteen names on that list of yours, counting three crab boats and Clyde's speedboat. So that means the other eleven are fishing boats. I think you said eight of those eleven men had lived here quite a while, didn't you?"

Roger nodded, and kept his own voice to a mere whisper as he answered. "More than twenty years, all of them. Most of them for their whole lives. The other three are what the local people still call newcomers. Bradshaw's been here four years, Slocum about five, and Wilkens-the three Wilkens brothers, that is-only about two years. I think they came from some town in New England."

"The Wilkens are my pet suspects," Bill breathed dramatically.

Slim grinned down at him. "You sound like a native- or have you got any other reason for your suspicions except that they are comparative strangers?"

"Well, that's part of it," Bill admitted. "I mean, maybe they just came here on purpose to do smuggling. Maybe they were smuggling stuff into some other town, and it got too hot for them there, and they moved here. And besides, they say they're brothers, but they don't look like brothers to me."

"The newcomer angle does sound a little suspicious, I grant you," Slim nodded. "But I can't give you much credit for the other one. There's no law that says brothers have to look alike. You and Roger don't look much alike, for that matter. And even if they're not brothers, they don't necessarily have to be smugglers. They might be lying about their relationship for some other reason."

"Well, there's something else funny about them," Roger put in. "We know all the fishermen around here pretty well-but we never could get to know them at all. Nobody could. They just keep to themselves all the time. Ask Uncle Willie-he'll tell you."

"I'll do that. And I'll make extra sure I get a picture of the famous Wilkens trio." Slim nodded soberly.

Bill pointed toward the mouth of the inlet. "Here comes the first boat."

"Good. Now I'm going to take a lot of pictures-of the boats tying up, the fish being hauled out, the packing and so on. If anybody asks you what I'm doing it for, tell them what you told Chris. And if they

seem to think I'm a little crazy, you can say you think so, too-but that people from the city are always doing strange things when they get to the seashore. Okay?"

The boys nodded.

Slim took his small camera from his pocket. "Let 'em come."

"That doesn't look like a very good camera," Bill said in a low worried whisper.

"It's kind of like my car-better on the inside than it is on the outside," Slim whispered, and Bill nodded, satisfied.

Within a few minutes the boat had come in close enough so that they could read her name.

"It's the *Maryanne*," Roger said. "One of the old-timers."

"Mr. Spotswood owns her," Bill added.

With a thin cloud of blue smoke coming out of her exhaust, the powerful craft headed in toward the dock, directly under the spot where Slim and the boys were standing. Skilfully she was maneuvered into position and the lines were made fast. The throbbing of the motor stopped and the work of getting the catch up to the dock began. Slim kept out of the way of the men hurrying back and forth along the platform, but the boys noticed that he was able to snap several pictures, all of which seemed to include some of the fishermen.

Finally he sauntered away and the boys followed.

"I've got enough of that one," Slim said. "Let's go out to the end of the dock. They're unloading a second boat out there."

There were two boats at the end of the dock by the time Slim began to make pictures out there, and then another one pulled in and tied up near the *Maryanne*. Slim moved back and forth unobtrusively, smiling apologetically at the men and saying a friendly word here and there. Nobody seemed to mind the photographs he was taking, and the few who questioned the boys about him seemed satisfied with their offhand answers about the whims of vacationers.

"I'm glad they don't all pile in at one time," Slim finally muttered, slinging his camera over his shoulder and getting out his pipe.

Bill squinted out over the sunlit water and suddenly tugged at Slim's arm. "Here comes the *Gertrude*," he whispered. "That's the Wilkens' boat. Get ready."

The *Gertrude* slid up to the dock and made fast, and as Slim leaned over the rail to get a better view, one of the brothers came out of the deckhouse, looked up and saw the camera, and ducked back inside again.

"Did you see that?" Bill breathed.

Slim nodded. "But he'll have to come out sooner or later."

And in a minute the man did come out again, but he had put a sou'wester on-one of those big fishermen's rain hats that shadowed a face pretty effectively.

"Darn it," Slim muttered.

The other two brothers appeared almost immediately afterward, each wearing one of the big hats.

"I guess you're suspicious now," Bill muttered triumphantly.

"I'm suspicious," Slim agreed, "but I don't know of what." He walked along the rail a few feet and clicked his shutter. "Maybe they're just camera-shy," he said when he came back. "Maybe they had a bad picture taken once, and they've never recovered from it." He grinned at the boys, leaned far over and took another picture. "I think I got one of them that time just as he looked up."

"He saw you, too," Roger murmured. "He looks plenty mad."

Slim took half a dozen exposures of the Wilkens' boat before it moved away to make room for another.

Bill looked at the small camera curiously. "How many pictures can you take on that roll of film?"

"Thirty-six," Slim told him. "And if I need more, I have another roll in my pocket."

They were waiting for the last batch of boats to tie up when Mr. Clyde approached.

"Pictures for the vacationer's scrapbook?" he asked cheerfully.

"That's it." Slim smiled back at him. "Thought I'd like to have a record of the fishing business to take back with me. I'm probably getting in everybody's way, but they seem to be good-natured about it." He looked down at the exposure-counter on the camera. "Got some left. How about one of you?"

Mr. Clyde laughed. "If the camera can stand it, I can. I'm certainly no bathing beauty. Where do you want me to stand?"

"Over here by the rail," Slim decided. "Then I'll get a nice background of masts and rigging-make you look like a real seafaring man."

"Take more than background to make a seafaring man out of me, I'm afraid. I'm just a natural landlubber." Mr. Clyde shook his head with mock sadness, but he walked over to the spot Slim had indicated and stood quietly while a couple of snaps were made.

Roger waited until Mr. Clyde had wandered away, a few minutes later, and then he pulled Slim's sleeve. "Here come Bradshaw and Slocum."

Slim ranged himself alongside the rail and got ready. He took three pictures of the Bradshaw boat, making sure that the crew appeared in each one, and then moved away to wait for the Slocum boat to tie up.

"At least old Bradshaw didn't cover up his face," Bill pointed out.

"No. I got him, all right. And Slocum is the last, isn't he?"

Roger nodded.

They walked to the end of the dock again, and the boys stood back while Slim leaned over the rail to shoot down at the boat that had just tied up below. He was leaning far over when a man carrying a packing case came along the platform. Just as he drew abreast of Slim, he slipped.

"Look out!" Roger yelled. "Duck!"

Slim swung suddenly, pivoting out of the way. But the corner of the heavy case struck his arm and the camera was knocked out of his hand.

"Sorry, mister. I must have slipped." It was one of the Wilkens

brothers who shifted the case to his other shoulder and looked around it at Slim. "But you ought to stay out of the way when this place is busy. 'Tain't safe here." He continued to stare belligerently at Slim from under the wide brim of his hat. Slim stood exactly where he was when the case had struck him, one arm behind him, the other hand on the rail that he had clutched to keep from falling. "Sorry I knocked your camera out of your hand," Wilkens added, but he didn't sound sorry at all. He sounded triumphant. "'fraid you'll never get it back. It's pretty deep down there."

"Oh, but you didn't knock it out." Slim straightened up, smiling cheerfully. "I keep a wrist loop on for just such emergencies." He brought his arm around in front of him, to show the camera dangling from it on a leather thong. "Handy gadgets, these things are." He rubbed his arm. "But after this, I'll watch where I stand."

Wilkens said nothing. He looked at the camera and then back at Slim. And then he turned and walked away, with his heavy burden.

The boys sighed with relief.

"Gee, Slim," Roger whispered. "I was sure it was gone. Do you think he *meant* to-?"

Slim looked thoughtful. "I don't know. I suppose he could have slipped."

"But there's no reason for him to be carrying a case full of fish way out here," Bill put in eagerly. "They take the full cases out the other way to load them on the trucks."

"I see. Very interesting," Slim said. "Very interesting, indeed."

"How's your arm?"

"It'll do, Roger. It wasn't really hit hard."

"Boy! What'd I tell you about the Wilkens brothers?" Bill whispered. "They wanted to make sure you'd never get that picture developed."

Slim smiled. "Well, if that's their idea, they haven't been successful so far. And we'll keep our eyes open from now on. Still got three more exposures. Ought to use them up. Let's go over to the other side of the dock."

"There's nothing over there," Bill pointed out, "except some rowboats and maybe a crab boat."

"Good. A crab boat could make that trip too, remember. And anyway, taking pictures over there too will help to give an air of authenticity to my curiosity."

There was one dirty old crabber in. It had an oily one-cylinder engine mounted amidship, and the owner was getting ready to start it. Slim took a picture of him just before he bent over the engine. After three or four vigorous spins, the motor caught and began to shake and wheeze as though each revolution were its last. The crabber cast loose his line then, and put the boat into reverse to move away from the dock. Just as he did so, another crabber came around the end of the dock, cutting in close, and barely missing the reversing boat.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" the owner of the incoming craft shouted.

"It's Old Man Tinkham," Bill muttered.

"Why don't you look where you're going yourself?" the other crabber countered angrily. "Ought to know better than to cut in so close-or do you think you have the only boat around here?"

"Bah!" Tinkham swung in a wide circle and approached the mooring from the other direction. He looked up from his task of tying the line to see Slim taking his picture.

"Huh! You again! Pity a young fellow like you can't find somethin' more useful to do than loafin' around all day." He came up the ladder then and passed them without another word.

"At least *he* doesn't seem to mind having his picture taken," Roger said. "He wasn't any crabbier than usual, anyway."

Slim closed up the camera. "There. That's that. I'll bet the boys back at the office are going to have a fine time with these things. By the time they separate the people from the fish, they won't know where they are. And now let's drop in at the diner and get some ice cream."

Bill beamed. "Swelll Only it's too bad Duckfoot isn't here. He likes ice cream, too."

CHAPTER TEN

It was only a short distance to the diner, but they went in the car so they would not have to return for it later.

"Do you want to stop at the drugstore and leave the roll of film?" Roger asked.

Slim shook his head. "I'll hand it over to one of our men tonight. He'll take care of having it developed for me."

"Well, you'd better hang onto it in the meantime," Bill said.

Slim grinned. "Worried about Mr. Wilkens' picture? Never mind-I'll take care of it."

"Say, we forgot the battery!" Roger said suddenly.

"Sure enough. Let's get it right now." Slim turned the car and drove over to the service station. The attendant said he had a battery, right enough, but wouldn't be able to install it in the car right away.

"It's not for the car," Slim explained. "I want it for electric lights up at the Baxter cottage. I'm their summer tenant."

"I see." The attendant looked at the boys and nodded. "Well, you can take it right along with you, then. Come inside and look over what I've got. There are three different sizes."

They all got out and entered the service station. "We don't need too big a one," Slim said.

"How are you going to charge it?"

They explained about the wind generator, and finally agreed that the smallest battery in stock would serve their purpose. While it was being tested, Bill turned suddenly and clutched Slim's arm.

"Where's the camera? You didn't leave it in the car, did you?"

"Right here in my pocket," Slim told him solemnly. "Safe and sound."

By the time they had completed their purchase, and had a quick disli of ice cream at the diner, Mrs. Baxter was waiting for them in front of Uncle Willie's.

"Have a good time?" she asked.

"Great. Got a lot of pictures, too."

"That's nice. Why don't you have supper with us, Slim? I got ours started before we left the house, and it won't take long to finish it up."

"Well, I'd like to, but I hate to impose on you."

"Nonsense."

"All right. Fine. Thanks. Do you mind if I just run up to the cottage for a few minutes first?"

"Of course not. Take your time. If you've all had ice cream-as I suppose you have-you won't be hungry yet for half an hour or so."

"We'll come along, Slim," Roger said. "Maybe we'll have time to connect the battery and see the lights working."

"Oh, no, you don't," his mother told him firmly. "If Slim says he'll be gone a few minutes, I believe him. But if you all get up there, goodness knows when you'd come back."

"Your mother's right." Slim nodded. "We'll rig up the lights after supper."

Slim returned as soon as he had promised, and they all had a gay meal together. Afterward the boys washed the dishes, and then they decided to go up to the cottage.

"Want to come, Mom?" Bill asked.

"I'll see them some other time. I have to write a letter to your father. Run along-but don't stay too late."

Outside it was already nearly dark. There was no moon, and a wet-smelling breeze had driven heavy clouds over the west, so that there was no after-glow from the setting sun.

As soon as they reached the cottage they all set eagerly to work. They ran leads from the switch contacts on the wall to the battery, and the ammeter needle moved up to the 15-ampere mark and stayed there.

"That thing is still working," Slim said with satisfaction. "Look at it!" A sudden puff of wind had rattled the windows, and

simultaneously the needle swung up to the 18-ampere, mark, and then dropped back again. "Let's turn on all the lights."

The room sprang into brilliance, and the darkness outside made the windows black rectangles in the walls. For some time they admired their handiwork, and planned the most advantageous places for extensions. Slim decided he wanted a light over his bed, so he could read there comfortably, and one above the big chair in the living room.

Finally he looked at his watch. "You two better get along home. I'll tell you what: wait until I unload the camera, and then I'll drop you off at your house on my way to deliver that roll."

He disappeared for a moment, and when he returned with the camera he was shaking his head. "It's beginning to rain. I'll hurry."

He opened the camera, took the cartridge of film from it and put it on the table, and began to load the fresh film in its place.

Then, suddenly, without any warning flicker, the lights went out.

"Hey!" Roger exclaimed. "What happened?"

"Something must have gone wrong with the generator." Bill's voice sounded unnaturally loud in the darkness.

"Wait until I get a flashlight," Slim said quietly. He groped his way across the black living room, muttering under his breath as he banged against a table on the way, and soon stood in the doorway sending a slender finger of light across the intervening darkness to where the boys were standing.

"It can't be the generator," Roger said. He had been thinking during those few minutes. "If something had gone wrong with it, the battery would have kept the lights going anyway." He started resolutely for the kitchen.

"Let's look outside first," Slim suggested.

"But, Slim, the trouble must be in-" Roger stopped as he saw that Slim was already making for the door, and, with Bill trailing after him, he followed. Slim led the way through the damp grass to the kitchen window, and briefly flashed his light over the wires that ran down the wall at that spot from the generator.

"Why, the wires have been short-circuited!" Roger said an instant later, instinctively lowering his voice. "Look at them! And it was no accident, either."

He bent over to look closer, but just then Slim left the wall in darkness by suddenly flashing his light through the window instead. With his free hand he shaded his eyes in order to look through the glass. And then, still without a word, Slim turned and sprinted around the house, leaving the boys open-mouthed in amazement. By the time they had recovered enough to take after him, he was swallowed up in the night.

A moment later they saw his light flickering across the lawn in the direction of the woods, and they began to run again, trying to keep their footing as well as they could. But by the time they reached the edge of the wood, they both realized there was no sense in trying to run through that tangle without a flash. "Slim!" Roger called.

They stood there, close together, waiting for him to reply. But there was no answer except occasional crashing sounds as a runner tore through the low, close-grown bushes, and, once, a faint glimmer of brief light.

"We'd better wait here," Roger said softly after a moment.

"Yeah. What do you suppose got into him? He acts as if he were chasing somebody."

"Maybe he is. Somebody shorted those lines."

"OK."

The sound of the wind in the branches overhead was somehow ominous.

"I guess detecting isn't always fun." "I'm kind of scared, too," Bill said quickly. "Who said I was scared?" Roger demanded. "I just said--"

"I know what you said. But I know what you meant, too. I don't know whether I'd feel safer inside that dark house, or out here."

"Just keep quiet, and we'll be all right," Roger advised. "Remember, if we can't see anybody, nobody can see us either."

"Yeah. I guess that's right. I *guess*."

It began to rain, gently, and they moved slightly to get under the heavy branches of a tree. It seemed a long time that they stood there in complete silence, before they saw again the flickering of a light, and then heard Slim's voice softly calling.

"Here we are," Roger said, trying not to sound too relieved.

A moment later the three of them stood together in the middle of the road.

"I lost him," Slim said briefly, fingering the scratch a branch had left on his face.

"Lost who? The person who did that to the wires?"

Slim nodded. "And the person who wanted our film so badly."

"You mean he got it?" Bill demanded hoarsely.

"Let's go into the house," Slim suggested.

"Can't we fix the short first, Slim?" Roger asked, as they moved toward the dark shape ahead of them. "It'll only take a minute to disconnect the wires where they were hooked up together."

"Good idea."

Slim held the light while Roger worked, and after a moment he said, "That'll do for tonight. We can do a better job on it tomorrow."

"Yeah," Roger agreed.

"And now let's see what damage this did inside."

Inside the kitchen, Roger stood looking down at the remnants of the fused wires that led to the battery.

"Whew!" he whistled. "That short sure burned things up." He poked around at the battery terminals. "Lucky we used these light wires. They burned out before any real damage was done."

"How about the ammeter?" Slim asked.

"What I want to know is how about whoever it was you were chasing," Bill stated.

"Just a minute, Bill," Slim answered. "Let's get this fixed up first."

"I don't know about the ammeter yet," Roger explained.

"Bill, give me some more wire and I'll hook her up again." Within five minutes the ruined wires were replaced, and when Roger made the last splice, the lights in the house came on again. He leaned close to peer at the ammeter, and then he sighed with relief. "It's all right. And the generator is, too. Look-it's charging 15 amps again, just as if nothing had happened."

"But what *did* happen?" Bill begged.

"Just hold your horses." Slim grinned at him, and went carefully around the house, pulling all the blinds to the lower edge of the windows. Then he returned to the kitchen, perched on the edge of the table, and lit his pipe. "Now I'll talk," he said. "You see, when the lights first went out, my mind worked just the way yours did, Rog. At first I thought of the generator, and then right afterward I knew it couldn't be that, because the battery would have kept the lights going even if the generator had failed. So I decided this was no ordinary accident. It must have been caused by somebody who wanted to get us out of the house, or who wanted the house dark and us in a confused state, so *they* could get in."

"And it was the film they wanted, wasn't it?" Bill asked.

"That's what I figured." Slim nodded. "And when I flashed the light through the window, from outside, I was just in time to see a hand snatch the roll from the table and disappear."

"Oh, gosh!" Bill groaned. "But Slim-if you'd already guessed what they wanted, why'd you let 'em get away with it?"

"Who said I'd let 'em get away with it?" Slim asked, grinning at Bill's crestfallen face. "I slipped the roll of exposed film into my pocket before I went after the flashlight, and left the new, unused roll in its place."

"Hurray! Boy, was that smart!" Bill crowed happily.

"That was sure quick thinking, Slim," Roger added admiringly.

"But I lost him," Slim pointed out soberly. "He got away from me in the woods."

"But you didn't lose the film while you were running, did you?" Bill was all ready to be anxious again.

Slim took the metal container out of his pocket and held it up. "No, I didn't lose it. I kept my hand closed on it while I was running. And it stays right with me until I hand it over to the man I should be meeting pretty soon." He looked at his watch. "Correction: the man I should be meeting right now. Come on, you two. I'll drop you off on the way."

"Do you think the pictures will tell you anything?" Bill asked.

"I'm more hopeful of them than I was," Slim answered. "Apparently somebody was willing to go to a good deal of trouble to prevent them being developed."

"You'll see. It'll be the Wilkens brothers," Bill assured him.

"I'll see whatever I'm going to see-tomorrow. Right now we've got to get moving."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"You two really ought to be kept in the house all day, for having come in so late last night." Mrs. Baxter looked severely at her sons over her cereal the next morning. "I'm disappointed in Slim, too. He should have sent you home earlier."

"But, Mom," Roger protested, "something-er-happened to the wires, and we had to fix them."

"You wouldn't want us to leave Slim in the dark, would you, Mom?" Bill asked.

She gave each of them a sharply questioning glance. "You're sure *I'm* not being left in the dark about something?"

"Dark?" Bill repeated. "Why, what do you mean, Mom?"

Roger kicked him under the table, but before he himself could make some statement that would allay her suspicions, a tap sounded at the back door and a moment later Slim walked in.

"I wanted to apologize to you about last night, Mrs. Baxter," he said. "I didn't mean to keep the boys out so late, but we ran into a little trouble with our wires, and they stayed to fix them."

Bill and Roger were both staring at Slim's face, and their mother's next comment was no surprise. They knew that she, too, had seen the long red welt across his cheek, where he had been scratched in his chase through the woods.

"You certainly look as if you'd run into trouble of some sort," she pointed out.

"Oh, that." Slim fingered the scratch and laughed. "I- er-had a little disagreement with a bush, when we went outside to-er-see what had gone wrong with the wires."

"Oh." She smiled. "I thought perhaps--you'd had a fight with your visitor."

"Visitor?" Bill squeaked.

And Roger just managed to prevent himself from repeating the word after him. How much did Mom know, anyway? And how had she found out about- He was certainly thankful that Slim was here to help handle this situation.

Slim bent down casually and scratched Duckfoot's ear. "You mean one of your sons? Oh, no, we don't fight." He grinned. "We may have an occasional disagreement over principles-Bill and I had one with Roger the other day, and Roger won-but we don't fight."

The boys laughed nervously, watching their mother closely.

"No," she said. "I meant the person who drove up to the cottage last night. I heard a car go up, and come down again later-shortly before the boys came home."

"Car?" Slim sounded mildly puzzled. "We didn't see any car. Maybe it didn't go all the way to the cottage."

"Maybe it was somebody who was lost-you know, who took the wrong road and found it out before he got to the top of the hill."

"I suppose it must have been. Well," to their great relief Mrs. Baxter got briskly to her feet, "we can't sit around here all day, can we? I suppose you three have all sorts of things planned to do." But her next words made them feel uneasy again. She said them casually-almost too casually. "I think I'll go down and have a chat with Uncle Willie this afternoon."

If Slim was worried too, he showed no sign. "I'd be glad to drive you down," he offered politely.

"Oh, no, thanks. I rather like the walk into the village."

The telephone rang at that moment, and she went to answer it. And by the time she had completed a rather lengthy conversation with the doctor's wife about their Sewing Circle meeting, the boys and Slim had finished the dishes.

"We're about to go off for a row," Slim told her. "Couldn't we persuade you to come along?"

"I'd like to, some time. I haven't been out on the inlet for weeks. But the ground is so soft after last night's rain that I'm eager to get to work in my garden. So run along and enjoy yourselves."

"We'll be back for lunch, Mom," Roger said.

"On time, I hope." Mrs. Baxter tried to look severe again, but the corners of her mouth gave her away.

"On time, I promise," Slim told her. And a few minutes later the three of them were strolling down the path to the Baxter dock.

Roger waited until he was sure they were out of earshot. "We'd better warn Uncle Willie that Mom is going to pay him a visit," he said then. "If she gets any more suspicious than she is, she'll make us spend the rest of the summer with our aunt in Carleton, or with Grandma or somebody."

"Your mother doesn't miss very much, does she?" Slim commented admiringly.

"She doesn't miss *anything*," Bill told him. "Gee, I bet if she knew what you were after, she'd have the smugglers in two days."

"Maybe we'd better tell her, then." Slim sounded so serious that Bill stared at him.

"I was only kidding," he explained. "Why, you're not worried, are you? Don't we practically know the Wilkens are guilty?"

"We don't *know* anything," Slim corrected him. "And the more I think it over, the less I'm inclined to believe last night's affair had anything to do with the smuggling."

These smugglers, whoever they are, are pretty smart, and I doubt if they'd, do anything so obvious or risky as that. After all, I might very well have caught the person who stole the film, and then their goose would have been cooked."

He got into the boat and settled down with Duckfoot in the back seat. "Well, we'll see. Pretty soon we'll hear whether our pictures are of any help, or not. In the meantime I'll just loaf-very ostentatiously." And he leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes.

The boys rowed lazily around toward the town dock, and tied up there long enough to have a brief conversation with Uncle Willie. He agreed to do his best to divert his sister's suspicions, if she voiced any to him.

"And she will, don't worry about that," Roger said. "Although," his uncle pointed out, "she can keep a secret as well as the rest of us. Of course, she might send you boys away, if she thought you were mixed up in something like this. But Slim could probably carry on without you."

"Our pal," Bill said bitterly. "Gee, Uncle Willie, we don't *want* to be sent away."

"All right, all right. I understand. I'll do what I can. And I suppose as long as nobody suspects Slim of being a detective, you're none of you in any real danger."

"Our pal," Bill repeated, warmly this time.

The sun got a lot hotter during the next hour, and Slim finally said, looking at the boys' red faces, "All right. I think I've loafed long enough at your expense. Let's go in."

Mrs. Baxter was in her garden as they came up the path. "Mr. Clyde just drove up the road toward the cottage, Slim," she told him. "I tried to call out to tell him that you weren't at home, but he didn't hear me."

"Thanks. I'll go right up." He continued to stroll slowly around the house with the boys, but when he had turned the corner he hastened his steps. "I don't want anybody snooping around when I'm not there," he muttered. "I'll see you two this afternoon, up at the cottage. Okay?"

They nodded and he jumped in his car and drove off.

Roger leaned on the fence. "Wonder what Clyde wants?"

"Probably to see the generator."

"Probably. I guess I'm just getting suspicious of everything. Well,"

Roger took a deep breath, "Mom's been saying we ought to clean out the cellar. At least it will be cool down there. How about it?"

Bill nodded bleakly. "I guess so. Might as well."

Slim was just finishing his own late lunch when they arrived at the cottage that afternoon, and they joined him in another glass of milk and some cookies, while Duckfoot feasted on a bone Slim had been saving for him.

"Before you fire any questions at me," Slim said immediately, "I'll tell you: Mr. Clyde came up to see the generator, and to invite me to a party at his house tomorrow evening. He's having some people out from the city that he said he thought I'd enjoy meeting."

"How are you going to get out? Want us to row you?" Roger asked.

"He'll pick me in the speedboat. I'm to meet him at the village dock at nine o'clock."

"I see." Roger tried not to let his face show what he was thinking—that, of course, anybody would prefer a speedboat to an old rowboat, and that probably Slim would have a swell time and would start going out to Smugglers' Island often. He and Bill had had Slim pretty much to themselves, and it had been fun. But once he started making a lot of friends, things would be different.

Slim, however, seemed to have the same ability that Mrs. Baxter had, to read people's minds. "Clyde's a nice chap," he said, "but not my kind. I'd rather fool around with a rowboat or a generator any day, than go kiting around in a five-thousand-dollar speedboat. But I want to get around as much as possible these days, and this party gives me a good opportunity."

"Sure." Roger felt suddenly happier. "Maybe you'll learn something important out there."

"But listen, Slim." Bill's voice was so unnaturally solemn that both of them turned to stare at him. "How do you know this isn't some kind of a trick? Suppose Mr. Clyde is mixed up with the smugglers some way, and wants to get you out in the boat and dump you in the bay?"

Roger began to laugh. "You're worse than I am, Sherlock Holmes. Look, we checked his boat for oarlocks, so that's something, even if it isn't proof he's innocent. And besides, he wanted his picture taken.

Does that look as if he had anything to hide?"

"But it's a possibility, isn't it?" Bill persisted. "You can't prove he isn't mixed up in it, can you?"

"No, but-"

"Bill's right," Slim said. "We can't prove anything- yet. And because I know that perfectly well, I'll be very careful, wherever I go. Don't worry about me."

"Well-" Bill sounded unconvinced. And then suddenly he brightened. "I know! You can signal us when you get home safe. Our room faces up this way, and we could see if you flashed a light at us-a flashlight. Will you?"

Slim smiled. "I'm afraid your mother will see to it that you're in bed and asleep before I get home. It will probably be midnight, at least-although I plan to use my illness as an excuse not to stay any later than that."

"Well, we could wake up. We could set the alarm for twelve o'clock."

"And Mom won't hear it go off, I suppose?" Roger scoffed.

"Not if it's under a pillow."

To Bill's evident joy, Slim nodded. "It might not be a bad idea. I'd be glad to know if we could successfully signal to each other anyway-for future reference."

"Oh, boy!" Bill's excitement was growing. "And we'll look up the Morse code some place, and learn it-and then we can really signal. I guess you already know it, don't you, Slim?"

Slim nodded. "All right. If you want to strain your memories learning-code, I won't stop you."

"We'll start right in tomorrow night. You blink the word *home*, and we'll answer O.K. We'll find a copy of the code tonight-I think Dad has one some place."

The boys spent the rest of the afternoon together on the cottage roof, giving the windmill another coat of paint. They had turned the revolving head so that the prop was at right angles to the wind, to

stop it until they could get the job done. It took one of them to hold it, and another to apply the paint. Slim was inside, installing a 20-ampere automobile fuse in their line, so that, as he explained, "If anybody tries to short our wires again, they won't kill the lights."

When the paint job was finished, and the boys were ready to come down, Roger paused to look out to sea.

"Gosh," he said, "you can see a long way from here, can't you? Look-the fishing boats are coming in. Hey- I've got an ideal Come on." And he clambered down so fast that he was inside the cottage before Bill had reached the ground.

"Can I borrow your binoculars for a little while, Slim?"

"Sure. They're on the little table in my bedroom."

When he hurried out of the house with them a moment later, Slim strolled after him, and Bill joined the procession.

"Where're you going?" Bill asked.

"Over to the edge of the cliff. I want to get a good look at those boats when they come in."

"But what for?"

"I'll tell you later--if it works."

Slim and Bill exchanged curious glances, but it was clear that Roger didn't want to answer any more questions right now. They followed him across the open lawn, through the woods that thinned as they neared the sea, and finally came out on the bare, craggy rocks of the cliff overlooking the water of the bay swirling between stones some hundred feet below. At this point, about a quarter of a mile from the mouth of the inlet, Roger lay down on his stomach in the shadow of a big rock. And Slim and Bill, with another exchange of raised eyebrows, lay down beside him.

"I could think of more comfortable places to take a sun bath," Bill pointed out.

"Let him alone," Slim advised. "If he's got an idea, he has the right to try it out."

"Quiet," Roger muttered, swinging the glasses carefully about.

"Is it all right if I light my pipe?" Slim asked.

Roger looked around the glasses, surprised. "Sure. Why not?"

Slim and Bill grinned. "I suppose it's all right if I breathe," Bill murmured sarcastically.

Roger grinned. "Sure. But not too loud. It disturbs my concentration." And then he peered through the glasses again.

He followed the first of the fishing boats until it was almost directly beneath them. Then he swung the glasses back toward the inlet and studied the boat that was trailing it in.

"For gosh sakes," Bill said finally, "we can see those boats plain enough from here without any glasses."

Roger ignored him, and continued to look long and carefully at each of the boats that entered the inlet. In the middle of his study of the eighth boat to come in, he stiffened. Carefully he adjusted the sights, and for a long minute he watched it. Then he turned toward the others with elaborate politeness. '

"I just thought you'd like to know who-whom, I mean-you were chasing last night." And he handed the glasses to Slim, who adjusted them and studied the boat beneath them.

"Nice going," he said finally. "Good work, Rog. Not conclusive proof, of course, but suggestive-very suggestive indeed."

"Don't mind me," Bill said pointedly. "I'm just a barnacle that happens to grow out here. But maybe you wouldn't mind telling Old Barnacle Bill what you're looking at."

Bill had been so busy watching his brother that it wasn't until Slim said, "Look for yourself," and handed over the glasses, that he realized the boat below was the *Gertrude*.

"It's the Wilkens' boat," he whispered. "But-" he peered at length and finally gave up-"but I can't see anything aboard that we could call a clue."

"Look at the men's faces," Roger told him condescendingly.

"I did. They look just like they always do. Except that one of them seems to have been in a fight. But what you think you see- Oh! I get

it!" He put the glasses down and stared at the others. "It wasn't a fight. You get scratches on your face from running through woods-like Slim did." He peered through the glasses again. "That's the oldest of the Wilkens brothers, isn't it-Steve-that has his face all scratched up?"

"That's right. Steve," Roger agreed.

Bill handed the glasses to Slim and then got to his knees and touched his head to the ground before his brother. "I apologize."

Roger grinned. "Never mind the apologies. What are we going to do about it?"

"What am I apologizing about anyway?" Bill sat up suddenly. "I'm the one who suspected them all along."

Slim knocked his pipe out against the rock. "We aren't going to do anything, right away. We'll wait for a report on those pictures, first of all. But it's mighty helpful to be fairly sure of who stole-or tried to steal-those pictures. You're a good detective, Rog."

Roger grinned self-consciously. "Thanks."

When the boys were ready to leave, Slim said, "By the way, suppose you two get up in your room and send me a couple of flashes tonight-say, about half-past eight. We might as well know whether our system is going to work or not."

"Swell. We'll be at the window at eight-thirty," Bill promised.

But when they got home they were distracted from their intention of looking up the Morse code immediately. Mrs. Baxter was bustling around the kitchen, and when she saw them she said quickly, "I'm so glad you got home. I've got to go to Carleton to see Aunt Martha-she just phoned that she's sick and wants me to come over for a few days to look after her. Can you two take care of yourselves while I'm gone? I thought I'd ask Uncle Willie to come here to stay nights."

"We'll be all right, Mom," Roger assured her. "Honestly we will. Is Aunt Martha very sick?"

"I won't know until I get there. Sometimes she only thinks she is, but I'll have to go there to find out. I thought I'd take the nine o'clock bus. I'd better call Uncle Willie now."

"We won't need him, Mom," Roger said. "We stayed by ourselves

three days last summer when Aunt Martha was sick-remember? And we got along swell. Don't worry about us."

"Well-of course Willie does hate to sleep any place but in his own bed. You won't mind, really? I'll ask him to feed you your suppers, but you'll have to manage alone for breakfasts and lunches. Can you do that?"

"Of course we can. Here, Mom-I'll finish up the table. Are you packed?"

"Yes, I'm all packed. All right, thanks, Roger. I'll just phone Uncle Willie then and ask him to pick me up to take me down to the bus."

The next few hours were busy. They all ate supper, and the boys washed the dishes while their mother got dressed. Everything was ready when Uncle Willie arrived.

"Good-bye," Mrs. Baxter said anxiously, kissing them both. "Take care of yourselves, and be good boys. And don't forget to go over to Uncle Willie's for supper."

"That, Mildred, is one thing you certainly need not concern yourself about," her brother said.

"You'll have to feed Duckfoot, too," Bill reminded him happily.

Uncle Willie groaned. "Oh, no-not that!"

So Mrs. Baxter was smiling as she went out to the car. "You might write your father a letter, too," she said, as the engine came to life.

"Sure, Mom, we will. You take care of yourself. And give our love to Aunt Martha."

When the car had vanished around the curve the boys sat down on the porch steps. "Gee, it feels kind of lonely around here already, doesn't it-even if it will be easier, not always having to be careful in front of Mom every minute," Bill muttered.

"Yeah," Roger agreed. And then he jumped to his feet. "Hey! We forgot about Slim-and it's past time to signal to him."

They clattered up the stairs to their room and looked out the window. From the kitchen of the cottage they could see a light winking at them. Roger took up their flashlight and blinked back.

"Wait a minute." Bill clattered down the stairs again and was back in a moment. "I thought I knew where it was. Here's the code. Let's send O.K. O is-" he paused, running his finger down the column-"is dash, dash, dash. And K is dash, dot, dash."

"All right." Roger Hashed his light, carefully. "Slim's signalling back. Write down what I tell you. Quick."

Bill copied down the string of dots and dashes that Roger recited, and when, finally, there was a long pause, they decided the message was complete. Both of them then settled down to look up the meaning of each group of signals in their book.

"M-U-S-T," Bill wrote. "That's the right word."

"Don't talk. Work. We don't want to keep him waiting all night. Here. S-E-E comes next. And then Y-O-U."

"*MUST SEE YOU*. It makes sense!" Bill exulted. They hurried on.

"C-A-N I C-O-M-E D-O-W-N," Roger put his pencil down. "*MUST SEE YOU CAN I COME DOWN*. I'll tell him yes." And as Bill looked hastily at the book he added, "Never mind. I'll make it O.K. I know that one already."

He blinked the signals, and Slim answered immediately with a returned O.K.

Then the boys went back to the kitchen and sat, curiously silent, at the bare table.

"It must be important," Roger said finally. "He wouldn't have sent a message like that just for practice."

CHAPTER TWELVE

They decided to start a letter to their father while they were waiting for Slim, but somehow it was hard to concentrate. And when they finally saw headlights approaching from the direction of the cottage they both rushed to the back door.

To their amazement the car went right on past.

"That was Slim, wasn't it?" Bill asked.

Roger nodded. "Sure it was. Maybe he had to buy something in the village."

They felt a little let down, somehow. Slim's message had sounded dramatically urgent, but apparently it couldn't have meant anything much after all. Still, it was hard to write to Dad, when you were wondering what Slim had meant.

Ten minutes later the car came back again, and Slim knocked at the door. Uncle Willie was with him.

"We wondered why you went past, before," Roger said.

"I wanted Willie in on this. He tells me your mother has gone away for a couple of days." Slim said.

"She caught the bus all right," the storekeeper assured his nephews. He looked down at Duckfoot, who was sniffing at his hand. "All right. Here you are." And he pulled a dog biscuit from his pocket and let Duckfoot take it from beneath his fingers.

"Now, let's talk." Slim settled down at the kitchen table, next to Uncle Willie. The boys sat down, too, eyeing him curiously. They knew now that they had been right in thinking that something important had happened. Slim's voice was deadly serious.

"I got a message over the radio a little while ago," he told them slowly. "It's what I've been waiting for." The boys leaned forward. "According to the English police, a tidy little shipment of gems was put aboard the *Oceana* when she sailed from Liverpool last Monday. We know who's carrying them. In fact, we have a man on board who's keeping a very close watch on the carrier."

"Gosh!" Bill breathed. "Are you going to arrest him?"

"Of course not," Roger told him sharply, before Slim could answer. "It's no crime to take jewels on a ship. They'll wait until he gets here."

"That's right." Slim nodded. "Now it's perfectly possible that the jewels will be brought in quite legitimately, through the customs. Or that an effort will be made to take them off the ship at New York, without paying any duty on them—that is, the carrier may try to sneak them past the customs by hiding them in his clothes, or in some other

secret place. If either of those things happen, the case won't concern us.

"But," he lowered his voice unconsciously, "it is also possible that the jewels will be thrown overboard in a bottle outside of Seaview, and picked up there. And since that *may* happen, it's our job to assume that it will, and to get to work."

"Is the *Oceana* coming past here tonight?" Roger asked quietly.

Slim shook his head. "She's not due until tomorrow night-about ten-thirty."

"Gee," Bill breathed. And then he added, "You won't be able to go to Mr. Clyde's party after all."

"Oh, yes, I will," Slim said. "In the first place, this is no time for me to make any move that looks in the least suspicious. And in the second place, Smugglers' Island is a good lookout post, and it won't hurt to have one of us out there."

"One of us?" Bill squeaked a little in his excitement.

"Yes. Now listen. As a matter of fact, we feel pretty certain that this is going to turn out to be our job-that the gems *are* going to be thrown overboard. Because this afternoon the man on board who has them got a radio message. A copy of it has been turned over to my department."

Slim pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. "This is what it said: 'To William Bullock, S.S. *Oceana*. Glad you are coming across. We'll keep a light burning for you. Do the same for us.' It's signed simply 'John.' "

"But how can you be sure that isn't just an ordinary message?" Roger asked, trying to maintain a judicial calm.

"We can't be certain, of course," Slim said. "But the address of the sender has been checked, and there is no such place. So we feel that it's safe to regard this as instructions to drop a bottle with a light in it at the usual place."

In the moment of silence that followed, Duckfoot sniffed noisily at Uncle Willie's hand again.

"No, you don't. Go away," Uncle Willie said impatiently.

But evidently Duckfoot didn't understand, for he sniffed again. And finally Uncle Willie put his hand in his pocket once more and got out another dog biscuit. "Now that's definitely the last one. Leave me alone."

Roger cleared his throat. Like Bill, he had read significance into that phrase of Slim's: one of us. "What do you want us to do?"

"Help man our lookout posts," Slim said soberly. "It won't be dangerous, or difficult, but it's important. We may not get another chance like this for months."

He folded up the copy of the radio message and put it away, and when he spoke again his voice was brisker. "You see, the coast-guard station will be watching, and so will I, and so will you boys and Willie. He's going to be down at the fishing dock, to keep an eye on what happens there-whether any of the fishing boats, or anything else, goes out at an unusual hour. I'll be on the island, of course. And you two will be up at the cottage for part of the evening, and out on the cliff there for the rest of it.

"When I said the *Oceana* would be coming past at about ten-thirty, that was only an approximate hour, of course. It's as close as we can figure now," Slim went on. "But our man aboard ship has a transmitting set just like mine. He'll keep a close watch on the carrier of the gems, and get a message through to us the moment he sees him throw anything overboard-if anything is thrown. I want you two boys to be at the cottage to pick up that message."

"Gosh," Bill whispered. Slim had been right. Their job was important. "But we don't know how to work that set of yours. Suppose we can't do it?"

"I'll teach you how. It's simple. Since I can't be there to take the message myself, and since we can't take the risk of bringing a stranger to the cottage at a crucial time like this, because he might be seen and arouse suspicion, it's up to you. But don't worry about it. I'll leave the set all ready. All you'll have to do is turn on the switch and keep your ears open. And then, when it does come through, you'll have to get the word to the rest of us."

"How'll we do that?" Roger asked, "if we're supposed to stay up there all the time?"

"We've got that worked out, too," Slim explained. "It will mean that you'll be away from the cottage for a while, but it won't be for

long. You're to hurry down to your own house, turn on the light in the kitchen, leave it on for half a minute and then turn it off for half a minute. Do that five times. You can't signal from the cottage, of course, because somebody might know that I'm not supposed to be at home, and they'd wonder about it. I'll be watching for your signal out on the island, and the coast guard can see it, too. Then you're to telephone the fish-packing plant. There won't be anyone there at that hour to answer, but Uncle Willie will hear the ringing, and he'll know what it means."

"Somebody else might dial that number by mistake, and Uncle Willie would think it was us," Bill pointed out.

"No, he won't. You'll see to that. You'll let the bell at the plant ring three times, and then you'll hang up. Then, one minute later, you'll dial again, and let the bell ring twice before you hang up. That way, he'll know for certain it's you calling. Then he'll flash a light from the end of the pier-so if I've missed your signal, I'll have another chance. After that you go right back to the cliff, find yourself a comfortable place, and settle down where you can watch the inlet. You'll have the binoculars with you. And I'll join you there when I come back from Clyde's house."

Slim sat up straight. "That's the whole plan. And I think, with all of us watching and listening as hard as we can, we ought to hear or see something happen."

"Do you think we'll remember everything you told us to do?" Bill asked in a subdued voice.

"Certainly," Slim answered.

Roger, too, had been wondering if they could follow through that complicated procedure without forgetting something, but the quiet finality of Slim's voice settled the question. They'd *have* to remember.

"We'll do it, all right," he muttered.

"Sure you will," Uncle Willie said, with unusual seriousness.

"And now let's drive up to the cottage and I'll give you a lesson in operating the radio." Slim got up and the rest of them rose, too, feeling a little cramped because they had been sitting so tensely during the whole conversation.

When Slim closed and locked the cottage door behind them, he

drew the shades before opening up the radio set cases.

"You'll keep the shades down tomorrow night, too," he pointed out. Quickly he connected the wires, and then he glanced at his watch. "Nine-twenty-eight. We've got two more minutes yet."

He flipped several switches and the little red and white windows on the panel board jumped alive. He beckoned the boys to come closer.

"Here," he explained, "is the switch that turns the power on and off. That's all you have to know. I'll leave the set connected just as it is now. You flip that switch, put the headphones on, give it a minute or two to warm up, and then just listen. It will be properly tuned, so you can't miss anything."

The boys listened closely. The radio had always excited them, but in the past it had been the messages themselves that caught their attention. Now they had to concentrate on the method of obtaining those messages.

"Our man on shipboard," Slim went on, "will make contact with you briefly the minute the ship approaches us. Then he'll go back on watch, and you won't hear any more from him until he has actually seen the jewels thrown overboard."

"Don't we have to say anything?" Roger wanted to know.

"Sure. You-" Slim glanced at his watch and broke off abruptly. He picked up the microphone. "I'll use the loudspeaker tonight, so that we can all listen." He turned another switch. "Calling one-two-four. Calling one-two-four," he said into the small black instrument in his hand.

"One-two-four," a ghostly voice said into the room. "One-two-four. Anthony. Anthony."

Roger and Bill stared at each other. Anthony?

"One-one-nine," Slim said. "One-one-nine. Cleopatra. Cleopatra. Any new word?"

"Nary a word," said the ghostly voice. "Five-six on the ferry says all is calm. What do you know?"

"Got my assistants here," Slim said. "Rehearsing for the opening

night. Listen to them. You may have to speak to them tomorrow." He held the microphone in front of Roger's mouth. "Go ahead, Roger-say something."

Roger felt foolish, but he spoke up firmly. "Hello. This is Roger. I-" But he got no further, for Slim had taken the mike hurriedly away.

"Sorry," he said into it. "I forgot to warn him. How about a number for my assistants? One will do for both of them."

"I've got lots of numbers," the voice said. "I'll make it easy. How about one-one-one?"

"Good enough," Slim replied. "One-one-one it is." He turned to the boys. "Never use names on the mike. From now on you're one-one-one-a number. Understand?" They nodded. "All right. Try it." He handed the microphone to Roger.

"Hello, one-two-four," Roger said. "This is one-one-one."

"A little young, aren't you, one-one-one?" the loudspeaker asked.

"You haven't heard anything yet," Slim said into the mike. He motioned to Bill to speak.

"Hello, one-two-four," Bill said, squeaking a little as he always did when he was excited. "This is the other one-one-one."

"Holy smokel" the speaker exploded. "Where do you work-in a kindergarten?"

Slim took it. "Don't worry," he said. "They'll do the job, all right. What's the good word for tomorrow?"

"Hold on. I'll look it up." There was silence for a moment, and then the loudspeaker intoned, "Move down five and over three. I'll do the same."

"Got it. Down five and over three. Good night."

"Good night," the speaker said, and then it was quiet.

Slim flipped off the switch, and then he pulled a small book from his pocket. The boys could see that its pages were covered with columns of words. Slim ran his finger down a column, stopped, ran down past five words, and then moved to the third column on the right.

"Pie," he said, mysteriously. Then he turned to another page and repeated the same performance. "Ice cream," he said finally, and closed the book. The boys stared at him curiously.

"Pie and ice cream are the recognition words for tomorrow night," Slim explained. "They ought to be easy enough for you to remember." He grinned. "Got it, now? You are *one-one-one ice cream*. And the man who'll be talking to you is *five-six pie*."

"One-one-one ice cream," Roger repeated. "And five-six pie."

"Right. He'll come on first, of course," Slim explained. "And he'll say five-six, five-six, pie, pie. You'll answer one-one-one ice cream. Then he'll tell you something which may not sound important, but it will mean that the ship is approaching. But the second time he calls, he'll identify himself, and-after you've identified yourselves to him-he'll just say 'Okay.' That's all. But it will mean that the bottle's overboard and that you two had better get going on those signals. Got it straight?"

Both boys nodded soberly. "We'll remember," Roger said.

"Swell. Any questions?" They shook their heads. Slim turned to Uncle Willie, who had watched the proceedings with a silence which at any other time might have meant he was asleep. But they all knew he had been listening as intently as any of them. "All right, Willie?"

"All right." Uncle Willie nodded ponderously.

"Swell. And now I'll take you all home. Oh-one thing more. When you come in here tomorrow night, don't turn any lights on at all. That will be safest, even if the shades are all down. Just use the small flashlight. You both know your way around in here, so you can manage all right." And he handed Roger a tiny cylinder, no larger than a fountain pen. When he pressed the button it gave off a feeble red light. "No one can see this at any distance. And, of course, don't make any more noise than you have to."

When the car left the boys on the dark road, in front of their house, they went inside quickly. Uncle Willie had asked, rather awkwardly, if they wanted him to stay with them that night, and they had both refused. Neither of them would admit, now, that the idea had been rather appealing. Not that there was anything to be afraid of, of course, but-Just as they closed the door, the telephone rang with a terrific jangle, and they both jumped spasmodically.

"It's only the telephone," Roger said, as soon as he could find his voice. "Put on the light. I'll answer it."

Bill moved toward the switch, and knocked a chair over on the way. "Ouch!"

The telephone rang again.

"Hurry up," Roger said.

"I *am* hurrying." The hall light went on, and Roger dashed for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Roger? This is mother."

Roger breathed a sigh of relief, although he couldn't have explained what he had expected to hear. "Hello, Mom."

"Are you two all right?"

"Sure, Mom."

"Were you asleep? I tried to get you earlier, but there was some trouble making the connection."

He was glad she hadn't been successful earlier. She might have been worried when they didn't answer. And he was glad she hadn't asked whether or not they were already in bed. She probably just assumed they had been.

"No, we weren't asleep. Yet," he said.

"Well, get a good night's rest."

"We will, Mom. Was your trip all right?"

"Yes, fine. Aunt Martha was asleep when I got here, and I didn't wake her, so I can't tell yet how sick she is. A neighbor has been taking care of her. I'll know more tomorrow, of course."

"I hope she's all right. We started letters to Dad."

"That's nice, dear. Don't forget to mail them. And take care of yourselves. Say good night to Bill."

"We will, Mom. You too. Good night." Roger put the telephone down.

"We will what?" Bill asked. "Take care of ourselves." "We hope," Bill corrected.

They both laughed, but the laugh had the lonely sound of someone whistling in the dark. "Let's go to bed," Roger muttered.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Just how they got through the next day without bursting from excitement, neither Roger nor Bill ever knew. There was work to be done around the house, of course, especially with Mrs. Baxter away. And they did it all conscientiously. They even mowed the lawn. And they finished their letters to their father. But somehow there still seemed to be long empty hours before evening, and they spent most of them sitting on the porch looking at each other or at Duckfoot.

Finally they decided it was time to go down to Uncle Willie's for supper, and although he wasn't quite ready for them, he seemed to understand their impatience. With their help he quickly finished up the pot full of fish chowder he was preparing, and they all sat down to eat. Duck-foot gulped the dish of food they set before him, and was sound asleep in his corner before the others were half through. Bill and Roger stared at him in astonishment. How could even Duckfoot fail to feel the air of excitement that filled the place?

It wasn't until nearly eight-thirty, when the sun was beginning to drop over the hills farther inland, that Slim appeared.

"Got a couple of messages," he said immediately, sitting down. "In the order of importance they are: first, the *Oceana* will pass by here at approximately nine-fifty; second, I know why the Wilkens brothers don't want their pictures taken."

"Why?" Bill was on his feet with eagerness.

"Not for the reason you thought." Slim grinned at him affectionately. "They don't have a criminal record at ail-any of them. And they really are brothers. Two of them are bachelors, and the third-the oldest-is married. But it seems that the one Mrs. Wilkens is the terror of the whole family. She doesn't like fish, for one thing, and

she tried to make them all give up fishing. So after ten years or so of her nagging, they left her everything they owned up in the little New England village where they lived, and sailed out in their boat. They just never went back. They settled down here instead, and have been perfectly happy together. But they want to make sure they aren't discovered."

"Gosh!" Bill sank down again, disgustedly. "Is *that* all?"

"That's all." Slim nodded.

Uncle Willie chuckled.

"And I thought the case was practically solved."

Roger was laughing a little, too, but now he sobered. "Never mind. Maybe it will be solved tonight."

Slim sobered, too. "That's what we're hoping for. I'd like you two boys to be up at the cottage by quarter after nine at the latest. And you ought to be at the dock by nine-thirty, Willie."

They went carefully over all their plans again, and the boys were proud that they remembered the exact schedule they were to follow. Finally Slim left to wander down to the dock himself, to be picked up by the Clyde speedboat. He was ostentatiously pocketing a package of pipe tobacco, to explain to any casual passers-by why he had stopped in at the store on his way.

"Good luck," he said quietly, just before he went through the door.

After he had left, Bill and Roger looked at each other. In a short time, now, they'd be at the cottage-in the dark, and alone.

"Now look here, you two," Uncle Willie said suddenly. "I know Slim's a smart chap, and we've gone over this whole thing at least ten times. It sounds safe enough, and I suppose it will be. But I want you two taking no chances -and I mean *no chances*. If anything unexpected happens, lay low or get away immediately. If you run into a suspicious-looking character-not that I think you will-don't be little fools and think you can do anything about it. Just do what Slim's told you, and nothing more. D'you understand?"

"Sure." Both the boys nodded. "And don't worry, Uncle Willie," Roger went on. "We're not scared or anything. And we'll have

Duckfoot along. He wouldn't let anybody hurt us."

"Well, I don't know about Duckfoot." Uncle Willie looked thoughtful. "Silence is going to be pretty important tonight, and Duckfoot doesn't always understand about silence. He's too friendly. I'd leave him here, if I were you. Unless you think you really need him for moral support."

"Oh, no." Roger tried to sound nonchalant. "I guess you're right, Uncle Willie."

"Yeah, I guess you are," Bill agreed reluctantly.

"Well, get along then, both of you. Here-you might want a couple of chocolate bars."

The light was failing rapidly as they pedaled their bikes up the hill past their own house, toward the cottage. The shrill noise of the windmill, when they drew near, sent shivers up their backs. Acting on Slim's orders, they picked up their bikes and carried them along into the house, using the key Slim had given them.

Carefully they set them down against the kitchen wall, and then Roger turned on Slim's tiny flashlight, and they locked the door.

"Come on," he whispered then. "Let's turn on the radio."

The little red glow of the light was so nearly lost in the room that they had to grope their way along, keeping their hands outstretched before them. But they got into the bedroom without any mishap, and found the radio all set up, as Slim had said it would be. He had attended to all the shades, too.

Roger bent down and moved the dim glow over the panel board. Then, carefully, he clicked a switch and a red pilot light went on.

"We'd better cover that up," Bill muttered. And indeed the pilot light glowed surprisingly bright in the darkness. He picked up Slim's blue denim shirt from a chair, and draped it over the radio.

Roger took the microphone and headset from their compartments, and placed them on the floor, ready for use.

"You can put one to your ear, and I'll put the other to mine," he whispered. "Okay."

After that there wasn't anything more to do, so they settled down as comfortably as they could on the floor, and huddled close together. Each told himself that their closeness would make it unnecessary to speak above a whisper, but the truth was that it was good to feel something warm and breathing next to you in this darkness.

Long slow minutes went by.

"Don't you have to turn the microphone on, or something?" Bill asked finally. "Hurry up-maybe we're missing something."

"It's all set. Slim fixed it," Roger told him. But just to make sure, he flashed the light on briefly and studied the board. As far as he could tell, everything was ready for reception.

They lapsed into silence again, and more long slow minutes passed.

Bill began to tidget. "I'm getting stiff. I'm sort of hungry, too. Maybe we ought to have a chocolate bar."

"All right. Get yours out. But don't make any noise with the paper."

"What's the matter with eating yours first?"

"What difference does it make whose we eat first? I-"

And then a ghostly voice sounded in the room. Roger stopped dead. For a moment they were both frozen into immobility.

"Five-six pie," it said softly. "Five-six pie."

With suddenly shaking hands they grabbed up the earphones. It seemed an endless time before they had them disentangled from the wires and held to their ears. But the voice was still saying "Five-six pie," patiently, when they were settled. "Come in," it added. "Come in."

"Go ahead," Bill whispered hoarsely. "Answer him."

"One-one-one ice cream." Roger's voice cracked and he cleared his throat. "One-one-one ice cream. Calling five-six pie."

"How's the reception?"

"Good." Roger's voice was under control now, and he was remembering to speak directly into the microphone, softly.

"Right." There was a tiny pause and then the voice said, slowly and distinctly, "Moving in. Getting close. Stand by, one-one-one. Will call you presently. That is all."

And that was all. No more ghostly words whispered out of the headphones. After a moment, when they were sure it was the end, the boys put down the headphones. Slowly their tensed muscles relaxed.

"Gee," Bill murmured, "that went all right. It was easy!"

"Yeah, that was easy, all right," Roger said. "But we're not finished yet."

They wondered how long it would be before the second call came through-the one that would tell them that a small bottle had been thrown overboard from the deck of the *Oceana*. It was strange to think of the big ship passing by, somewhere several miles out at sea, and a voice from it whispering into their ears. Strange and somehow scary.

"I-I guess we'd better eat a chocolate bar now," Bill said. "You know-in case we don't have time later on." And without argument he pulled the bar from his own pocket, and carefully unwrapped it. "Here's your half."

"Thanks."

There was probably no need for the sort of desperate quiet they were maintaining, but somehow it seemed important. They even tried to swallow without making any noise. Although overhead, of course, the windmill was wailing, and the house creaked sharply once in a while, or a window rattled in a gust of wind. Each of them jumped slightly at every one of those noises, but neither of them referred to them.

"I wish I had a watch," Roger said, after they had sat without speaking for what seemed several days. "It must be at least half-past ten."

"It can't be," Bill told him, although he had been thinking almost exactly the same thing. "I mean-the ship is due to pass opposite the inlet at nine-fifty, and that's probably when the bottle will be thrown over. We'll get the message then."

"If the bottle's going to be thrown over at all," Roger pointed out. "Suppose the smuggler caught on that he was being watched, and just doesn't do it?"

"I guess that could happen." It was a disheartening thought, when they were so keyed up. But, on the other hand, it would be pleasant not to have to go out into the dark and follow through the rest of the instructions.

"Well, if he isn't going to throw it overboard, I wish he'd let us know about it, so we wouldn't have to go on sitting here," Bill added, and he gave a little nervous giggle.

"Sh-h-h," Roger cautioned. "Don't get to laughing, or the message might come through and we wouldn't hear it."

Bill swallowed his giggles and they sat still for another long time.

"I'm getting sleepy," Bill whispered finally.

"Oh, for gosh sakes," Roger said sharply. "You're a fine detective, you are!"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to go to sleep. I just said I was getting sleepy."

There was a light crackle in the earphones and the boys stiffened.

"Five-six pie."

Roger moved cramped arms and picked up the earphones, and they huddled closer together so that they could both listen.

"One-one-one ice cream," Roger said into the microphone. "One-one-one ice cream. Come in."

"Okay," the phone whispered. "Okay. That is all." And it was dead again.

"That's it," Roger said excitedly, putting down the phone.

"You mean that's all he's going to say?"

"Sure. Slim told us he might not have a chance to say much. But that's enough. 'Okay*' means the bottle's overboard. Come on." Roger was moving hurriedly, putting the earphones and microphone away, flipping off the switch. "Come *on*. We have to get going."

"I'm coming." Bill's throat was dry, and Roger didn't hear the words at all, but he could feel Bill, beside him, getting to his feet.

Together they felt their way to the front door. Roger unlocked it and opened it a crack to peer outside. Everything looked quiet and normal. He opened it wider and they slipped through, and then he closed it softly behind them and locked it again.

They tiptoed down the steps and, crouching low near the shrubbery, skirted the house and cut across the rear lawn to the trees at the edge of the clearing. They weren't to use their bikes for this trip, Slim had advised. Walking was less dangerous in the dark, and he'd said he'd feel safer if they walked. They followed the edge of the clearing until they came to the road, and then started downhill, keeping in single file and to one side, in the shadows.

When their eyes were completely accustomed to the dark, they broke into a trot, slipping and stumbling once in a while over little stones. They were out of breath when they reached their own yard, but they didn't pause. Roger reached down along the door frame and came up with the key. He unlocked the door and they got inside, and then he locked it behind them.

"You go in the kitchen and start the signal from there-remember how it goes? Five-?"

"Sure, I remember."

"All right. I'll call the packing house on the pier, and be right in."

"Can we put a light on in the hall?"

"Sure."

While Bill got out their flashlight, Roger ran to the telephone and dialed the number he had looked up and memorized that afternoon. Three times he let the bell in the packing house ring, and then he hung up quickly. While he counted out the one-minute wait, he looked in to see that Bill was doing his job. Then he dialed again and let it ring twice this time before he replaced the receiver. After that he joined Bill and they finished the flashing signal together.

"Well, that's that. I only hope we did everything right."

"I hope so, too." Roger went over it all in his mind. "I'm pretty sure we did. And now we go back to the cottage. I guess we could take time for a glass of milk first, though."

"Sure we could." Bill made for the refrigerator. "The boat's

probably already gone out, and it will be quite a while before it gets back. They'll have to look around for the bottle, and then come back again. It will probably take a couple of hours altogether."

"I suppose it will."

"Seems funny to open the refrigerator and not have Duckfoot come running, doesn't it?" Bill muttered. "I sort of wish we had him along tonight. Even if he is too friendly to be a good watchdog, he's well, sort of nice to have around."

They drank their milk in silence after that. Even the bright light of the room couldn't dispel the creepy feeling that had settled down over them up in the dark cottage.

"Well," Roger said finally, taking his glass to the sink to rinse it out, "I guess we'd better get going."

"I know."

Roger picked up Slim's binoculars from the table and slung the strap over his shoulder. "Go ahead. I'll turn out the light."

Soon they were out in the dark again, trudging their way up the road. Instinctively they kept again in the shadows, and just as instinctively they walked in silence except for the occasional rattle of a stone.

Suddenly Bill coughed.

"Keep quiet," Roger muttered.

"I couldn't help it. Something's tickling my throat. Like dust, or something. Do you suppose somebody just came along this road and stirred it up?"

"Oh, sure!" Roger's voice was heavy with sarcasm. "There's always a lot of traffic along here-you know that."

"I don't care. Something made me cough. And I think I can smell dust. And you know it couldn't have been us that stirred it up-we stayed on the side all the way down, and we're on it now."

"Oh, don't be such a ninny. And keep quiet. We'll be at the cottage in a minute, and we want to get across to the headland without making any noise."

"If there's nobody around here, why do we have to be so quiet?"

Roger ignored that. When they came over the last rise, at the clearing, they stopped for a moment and looked around. Nothing moved or sounded anywhere, except the faint rustlings the wind made, and the turning of the windmill.

Taking the lead, Roger crossed the road to the lawn, and followed the line of the trees until they had come around to the far side of the house. Then they struck off through the woods toward the sea. Dimly the sound of the surf pounding at the rocks below came up to them, growing louder as they came nearer.

Suddenly Roger stopped, and put his arm behind him to bring Bill to a halt. He put his mouth against Bill's ear. "I think I smell something."

Bill opened his mouth to sneer "Oh, now *you* smell something." But just before he spoke he sniffed. "I think I do, too," he whispered quietly. "I think it's cigarette smoke."

"That's what I think."

"Sh-h-h." Very cautiously Roger began to move forward again, his hand still on Bill's arm. They picked their feet up and put them down with infinite care.

But by the time they came to the bare rocks at the far edge of the woods, the smell had disappeared. Roger was about to assure himself that he had been imagining things -that he was as bad as Bill-when he stopped still again. He felt certain there had been a movement over near the trunk of a solitary tree that grew by itself, out on the rocks.

With a warning squeeze of Bill's arm, he shifted his course slightly toward the left, and moved slowly forward again, keeping in the shelter of the wood's edge.

Bill motioned, to indicate that they were to have gone straight ahead, but Roger only nodded impatiently and pulled him along. And then once again he stopped, this time frozen in his tracks.

He had seen something, over by that tree, that could have only one explanation. It had been a tiny fiery arc, curving down toward the waves below. It could have been made only by a cigarette, tossed from the rocks into the sea.

"Did you see what I saw?" Bill's tense whisper breathed against his ear.

Roger nodded. And now there was a definite movement over there by the single tree, and the figure of a man stood apart from it, to be silhouetted against the faintly star-lit sky. The figure reached up long arms in a lazy stretch, and then melted back into the tree again. But they had seen it clearly. They had both seen it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Roger clamped his hand over Bill's mouth, but Bill was too startled and frightened to speak anyhow. For a long moment the boys stood there, scarcely breathing.

Finally Roger's brain began to function again. He told himself that, for one thing, he and Bill apparently hadn't been noticed-so far. But they'd better be more than careful from now on. Silence would no longer be a matter of instinct. It would be a matter of necessity.

Slowly he took his hand from Bill's mouth, and, with a gesture to Bill to follow, began to inch his way toward the edge of the cliff. He knew if they moved slowly enough they probably couldn't be seen at all in the darkness. The woods behind them prevented their figures from showing against the sky, as the stranger's had.

They moved on a diagonal line, so that, finally, they reached the edge of the cliff some distance away from the lone tree and the man beside it. Then Roger, feeling his way ahead with his toes, moved among and between the big rocks until they were on a wide ledge some five feet below the top of the cliff, and further protected by a big upstanding boulder above them and somewhat off to one side, in the direction of the man. The surf pounded noisily below them, and here they would be able to whisper together without danger of being heard even a few feet away. And the stranger was fully thirty feet distant.

"All right, now," Roger breathed against Bill's ear.

"Do you-think he's one of Slim's men?" There was a forlorn hope in Bill's voice.

"Slim would have told us." Roger, too, had had that hope for a moment, but had decided the idea was more than unlikely. "Must be

one of the smugglers."

"But what's he doing here?"

"How do I know? He's probably a lookout-like we are."

"Well-what are we going to do?"

"I-don't know, exactly."

"They told us to get away if something happened. And something sure happened, all right. Gee," Bill added, "I almost fainted when I saw him."

"They said to get away *or* to lay low. Why can't we just stay here, like we planned? That would be laying low. And maybe we can even do something about that man."

"You mean capture him?"

"Don't be crazy. What chance would we have of capturing him? He probably even has a gun."

"Well, what did you mean then?"

"We could watch him, couldn't we? If one of us stuck our head around that rock every couple of minutes-there are toeholds here behind us we could use-he'd be pretty sure not to see us, but we could see him if he did anything. And if he looked over in this direction we'd just get back down here and keep quiet. He'd never see us, even if he walked right along the cliff over our heads. We might get a clue."

"Phooey! We might get a shove right over the cliff, too."

"No, we wouldn't." Once again Roger explained the position of the rocks around them, and how safe they were.

"All right," Bill finally agreed. "But if he does start walking over this way, I'm going to crawl right inside these rocks."

Then he felt around the rocks at their backs until he found a small niche big enough to hold his foot, and, with his hand on Roger's shoulder, began to hoist himself up. "I'll take a look," he whispered.

Roger stood just below him, and in a moment Bill bent over and whispered, "Okay. I can see him." And he motioned toward the inlet to indicate that Roger could take over the lookout job they had originally

been assigned to.

So Roger settled down on the ledge and pulled the binoculars from their case. He trained them on the lights gleaming brightly in Clyde's house. Smugglers' Island was about the same distance from the cliff as the mouth of the inlet was, and he was sure that if he focused the glasses properly for the lit windows, they would also be set for the narrow gap of water off to the right.

However, when he swung the glasses toward the inlet, he realized that it would be only by the greatest good luck that they would notice anything that came through the mouth. The blackness was complete. He hoped the moon would come up in time to lay a bright path across the water before the smugglers' boat came through.

After a minute he tapped Bill's foot, and Bill swung around and put his head down. When Roger stood on tiptoe, their faces were close together.

"I can't see a thing," Roger whispered.

"Well, I can, and I don't like it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he's still standing there, but I think he looked over in this direction once."

"Oh." For a moment Roger had been really alarmed. "I wonder what time it is."

"Why?" Bill giggled. "Are you going some place?"

"Don't be so funny. And get back to your job."

For another long period there was only the sound of the water, and an occasional gust of laughter blown across from Smugglers' Island. It made Roger wonder if Slim was having a good time, and it occurred to him that Slim's job tonight was certainly a lot pleasanter than the one he had assigned to them. But an instant later he was ashamed of himself. After all, each of them had to do what he could. And it was his own fault that he and Bill were in on this at all.

Then he began to wonder about something else. If a man's laugh could be heard across the water, surely a boat might be heard, too-if it made the least noise at all. He shifted to a new position on the hard,

uncomfortable rock, and forced his eyes and ears to concentrate harder than ever. It would certainly be swell if, among the various watchers scattered around the inlet tonight-at the coastguard station, and on the dock and on the *island-he*, Roger Baxter, were the one who discovered the vital clue.

A faint scrabbling sound behind him caught his attention, and he swung around to feel Bill lowering himself down to the ledge.

"Get back against the rocks!" Bill whispered urgently. "He's coming over this way!"

They flattened themselves against the rough stone, pulling their sweaters over their heads to conceal any telltale blur of pale skin that might catch the man's eye, should he look right down the cliffside.

After a moment they heard a shoe scraping on stone, and then, only a little distance away, a pebble rattled over the edge and clattered its way into the sea. The boys held their breath. The sound of footsteps came closer, until they knew the man was directly above them.

But he didn't stop. The steps grew fainter again.

"Take a look," Roger whispered after a lengthy interval. "But be careful." And he helped Bill to climb silently up until he could see over the top.

Almost immediately Bill lowered himself again. "He's coming back this way."

Again those slow footsteps came nearer and nearer until they were overhead. But once more they didn't stop, and soon they could no longer be heard.

Bill took another look.

"Okay. He's back where he started." And he gestured to indicate that he would remain there on his perch.

Roger turned out toward the sea again, and swept the inlet with the glasses, trying to hold them steady in hands that were still shaking a little after the past several minutes' tenseness. The coast-guard station was lit up, as usual, and there were still many lights shining in Clyde's windows. Roger thought he could even make out the figure of Mr. Clyde, standing near one of the brilliantly-lit apertures. Crab

Island was dark, as it always seemed to be. And that's all there was to see. No sign of a boat, no sign of-

Bill was coming down again. Roger steadied him for the last step, and he could feel the muscles tight in his brother's arm.

"What's the matter?"

"Rog, you take a look. He's-he's doing something, but I can't tell what it is. It looks as if he had a telescope up to his eyes, or something."

"Okay. Hold these."

Roger handed him the binoculars, and hoisted himself up, carefully, until he was in the position Bill had been occupying. He squinted his eyes in an effort to penetrate the dark.'

Bill was right. The man was holding something up in front of his face-some sort of a tube. It could be a telescope, Roger thought. It was just about the right length.

"Well, I hope he can't see any more than we can," he thought.

And then his eye caught something. A light. Just the briefest of flashes, and very small. Another cigarette? No--there it was again.

Suddenly he knew. It was a signal light. It blinked three times in rapid succession. Then there was a pause, and it blinked three times again.

On a sudden impulse, Roger swung his head around, and he thought he caught a faint single answering flash from somewhere out to sea, beyond the inlet's mouth. A moment later Bill tugged at his foot, and he knew Bill must have seen it, too. Roger wagged his hand down at him, and turned back to watch the man again. Now he was apparently folding up the long tube, and he seemed to put it in his pocket, or inside his coat. And then he moved away from his post, in the general direction of the cottage and the road.

Roger was down on the ledge in an instant, his mouth against Bill's ear.

"I think I saw a light," Bill began.

"I know. It was a signal. That's what the man up there was doing-

signaling. And they answered, out on the boat. So he's leaving now, and I'm going to follow him. You stay here."

"You're going to-I Don't be a sap! You know what we were told."

"But who knew something like this would happen? We can't afford to let him get away."

"Well-I'll go with you, then."

"You can't. Somebody has to stay here and keep an eye on the inlet. That boat should be coming in pretty soon, if it was close enough to signal. Within an hour, I bet. You'll have to stay here."

Bill was silent, and his face looked as pale as a ghost in the darkness.

"Are you scared?" Roger wasn't teasing him. He just wanted to know.

Bill seemed to understand. "Not-not too scared. Are you?"

"Not much. I know the country around here better than that man does, anyway. That's something. He'll never know I'm following him. And you'll be all right up here, now that he's gone."

"Yeah. Sure. Well-go ahead then. But be careful. I'll keep watch here."

Roger put a hand on Bill's shoulder. He did seem awfully young to stay out here alone, but- Well, this was the only way to do it, that was all. "So long." And he put his foot in the niche and started to hoist himself up to the top of the cliff.

"So long," Bill whispered behind him.

Roger sighted his quarry up ahead, on the path, and laid his plans. He didn't have to take the path himself. So he could cut ahead of him and wait. And when the man had passed his hiding place, he'd take another short cut, and wait again. This way he could stay close without so much danger of being seen, at least until they hit the road.

Crouching and moving as quickly as he could, he reached the woods, and from the protection offered by the dense growth, he stood up and looked behind. He saw nothing at all, but after a moment he heard cautious footsteps, feeling their way, and then he saw the light

of a flash turned momentarily downward. It disappeared again, and the footsteps came on.

Treading carefully, Roger went through the trees toward the clearing around the cottage. He crept around the edge of the outer rim of trees until he was in line with Slim's back door. Then he bent over low and hastened across to the protection of the back porch. He put his head carefully around the corner, and looked back once more in the direction he had come.

Now the footsteps were louder, as they came through the underbrush. Old leaves crackled and twigs snapped. Roger strained his eyes in the direction of the sound. Suddenly he could make out a faint shape at the far edge of the clearing. Although he knew he was well protected, Roger could scarcely resist the temptation to duck behind the corner; but he forced himself to hold still, and to keep his eyes on the man's figure. It moved directly across the cleared ground.

That was what Roger had been waiting for. He slipped around the cottage into the trees, keeping the house between himself and the stranger. Once among the trees, he skirted around until he struck the road, crossed it, and buried himself in the brush. He waited there, quietly, his heart pounding so loudly that he was sure it could be heard.

Footsteps were coming close again. They were loud, as if the stranger had no fear of being overheard. Closer and closer they came, until only ten feet separated Roger from the man. Roger held his breath as the steps continued, and carried the stranger past his hiding place.

After waiting a little, to give his quarry a lead of at least a hundred feet, Roger crept out and began to follow, sticking close to the side of the road so that he might not readily be seen even if the man glanced around.

Down and down they went, the man leading by a safe margin, and walking boldly in the middle of the road. Roger hugged the bushes, and forced himself to stop every few steps to make sure the sound of the other footsteps continued. If the man were to stop in his tracks, Roger might not notice immediately that he was no longer moving.

Suddenly the boy's sweater caught on a bush, and branches snapped back with a swish. Roger stopped dead and held himself

perfectly still, his heart in his throat. Ahead of him the other steps stopped, too. The man had heard the noise.

Roger thought he swung around and looked back, but he couldn't be sure. He had to concentrate on holding himself rigid.

But after what seemed an interminable interval, the footsteps sounded again. Either the man had decided that he imagined the noise, or he attributed it to some small wood animal.

Roger took a trembling breath, and moved ahead again himself.

When they passed the Baxter house, Roger looked at it yearningly. He wished he could slip inside, and telephone somebody. Let somebody else carry on from here. But it was too risky a chance to take. By the time help arrived, who knew where the man would have got to? And besides, whom should he telephone? No, it was better to keep going himself.

When they reached the wider, graveled road, Roger was forced to take to the grassy shoulder to avoid making any noise. The man moved more quickly now, and Roger was forced to take long steps to keep up.

Suddenly Roger stopped. There was no sound up ahead.

Had the man stopped? Or had he, too, moved to the quieter grass?

Then Roger heard the unmistakable sound of a car door opening and closing, and he thought he could make out the squat shape of an unlighted car.

He began to move again, quickly, but with infinite care. When he had gone fifty feet, he saw a match flare, move, and then fly outward and down to the ground. In its brief light the interior of the car had been shown up. There were *two* men inside!

Roger lowered himself cautiously into the shallow ditch below the shoulder, and crept forward on his hands and knees, feeling ahead for loose stones or noisy dry weeds. Only thirty feet separated him from the car now, and he knew what he had to do: he had to get its license number before it drove away.

Slowly the thirty feet reduced themselves to twenty. And then to ten. He could occasionally see the glowing ends of two cigarettes now,

when the men turned toward each other, and fleeting, uninformative glimpses of a jaw line or the end of a nose.

He could even hear faint sounds, tag ends of words. But he didn't dare to stop and try to listen now. The important thing was to get the number.

His knees were sore and bruised, but he scarcely noticed. Just a few more feet now.

He reached forward, and touched the rear bumper. But it was too dark to make out the muddled-over figures, even at close range. Could he tell what they were by feeling them, one by one?

And then he thought of Slim's dim flashlight in his pocket. Maybe he could take a chance and light it briefly. Would they see its glow from inside the car?

He was still trying to make up his mind when he realized, with a start, that the voices were perfectly understandable, now that he himself was still, and so close.

"I don't like it much," a grim bass rumbled.

"Don't be a fool." The answering voice was a notch higher, and sharper. "We know they've been following Shorty for months. We know they've been keeping an eye on him on the ship. But Shorty's smart. Everything's working out. And when they search him at the pier, they can look for ten years without finding the stuff because it won't be there. We *want* them to worry about Shorty. It'll take their minds off of Doc-and he's the one who is bringing the big haul."

"And you're sure they don't suspect him?"

"We're sure, all right. They'll never expect another load so soon."

"Yeah? Well, I hope you're right. I'm getting jittery."

"Cheer up-you can take a vacation next week. We're going to lay low for a while and let things cool off."

"Not till next week? D'you mean I have to stand up on that cliff again day after tomorrow?"

"No. We were just being extra careful tonight, because we knew they've been on Shorty's trail. But if even Shorty could fool them, we

won't have to worry about Doc. They're not even suspicious of him."

"If Shorty fooled them," the other voice echoed dubiously.

There was a short, irritated laugh. "If he did! You got the signal yourself, didn't you-saying they're as good as in now? Be landed in an hour? And we know there's nobody around here to stop them coming on in. Or aren't you sure you saw the signal? We put you on this job because you've got good eyes, but if you're not sure-"

"Oh, I saw it all right."

"Then quit worrying. And we'd better get a move on. Don't want to be standing around here when any early fishermen come out."

The starter ground for a moment and the motor came to life, purring quietly in the darkness.

Roger, every nerve alert, reached for the flashlight to take a quick look at the license tag. But before he could get it out of his pocket, the tail light of the car went on and the gears ground as the driver shifted into low speed.

The car moved off, but not before Roger had seen the number in the tail light's glow. He kept his eyes on it, kneeling there in the road, and repeated it over and over until he was sure it would remain in his memory forever.

When the red tail light disappeared around a corner, Roger got stiffly to his feet, took a few limping steps, and then found he could run.

He had to tell Uncle Willie, and get the news to Slim somehow. Of course, they'd be able to interpret the conversation he'd overheard better than he could himself, but even he knew that it had meant, for one thing, that the boat bearing the smuggled gems was on its way in. He hoped Bill-or Uncle Willie or the coast guard or *somebody-would* see it or hear it the minute it came through the mouth of the inlet, so they'd be all ready to meet it when it landed.

Why, the case was almost finished! And they were going to get not only tonight's haul, but the whole smuggling gang.

He ran faster, still repeating the number over and over to himself.

Roger pulled up short when he reached the pier. He couldn't run the length of that wooden structure without making a good deal of noise, and he mustn't do that. He stood still in the shadow of the packing house for a moment. He'd been in such a hurry to get here that he'd almost forgotten the importance of silence. Suppose somebody had heard him and followed him here?

But, when the noise of his pounding heart quieted a little, he listened intently and realized that there was no other sound in the air but the soft lapping of the water around the pilings of the pier. It was probably all right, then, but he'd better be careful from now on.

One dim bulb burned at the end of the dock, and its feeble light only made the night seem more dark. Carefully Roger moved forward, keeping close to the side of the building and setting his feet down stealthily. When he reached the end of the packing house, and looked down the fifty-foot length of the open wharf, he could see no sign of Uncle Willie. But he moved forward again, against the rail, straining his eyes. Uncle Willie must be here some place. And then, finally, he saw a shadowy figure bulking large a few feet ahead of him.

Roger took another step before he whispered, "Uncle Willie."

The big figure swung around, quickly and silently.

"It's me-Roger."

"Something wrong? Where's Bill?"

"Up at the cliff. He's all right. I had to tell you something."

Uncle Willie swung around again so he could continue his watch over the water, and pulled Roger with him. He laid a big warm comforting arm across Roger's shoulders and then said, "All right. Go ahead. Just want to keep an eye out."

Roger was grateful to him for not getting excited, but he might have known Uncle Willie would have taken it like this. He told his story as quickly as he could, trying to emulate Uncle Willie's calm by leaving out all references to his own and Bill's reactions, and just sticking to facts.

"So can we get word to Slim?" he concluded. "Right away?"

"Good work, son," Uncle Willie said, with a single pat of his big hand. He was quiet for a moment before h'e went on. "Hmm," he said then. "That's easier said than done. We can't very well telephone him, or row out there and say he has to come ashore." He looked at his watch. "Twenty past eleven. He's due back anyway at midnight. That's not so far off."

"But the man said the boat would be in in an hour," Roger pointed out. "And that was-well, anyway, fifteen or twenty minutes ago."

"I know. So the boat must be due about midnight. 'About,' mind you. They couldn't estimate a thing like that to the minute, even if they did have a signal. Maybe it won't come in until a good deal later."

"But, geel We can't count on that. Suppose it does come in by midnight, and Slim isn't back yet?"

"Well, as long as we know what boat it is and where it landed, it won't matter so much. And with all the lookouts we've got on hand, we certainly ought to hear it even if we don't see it. Those overweight clouds up there aren't much help, darn 'em."

For the first time since he'd left the cliff, Roger became aware that although the moon had risen, the sky was so clouded over that it was seldom visible-and cast very little light indeed. Uncle Willie was right-they might very well not see a boat under the circumstances. But surely somebody would hear it, even if it was being rowed after it reached the mouth of the inlet. There would be the scrape of an oarlock-or *something*.

Suddenly a dull throbbing reached his ears, and he clutched Uncle Willie's arm. Uncle Willie heard it, too Roger could almost feel the intensity with which he wa ·listening.

The throbbing rose to a roar and then subsided again.

"That's Mr. Clyde's speedboat," Roger whispered excitedly. "They must be getting ready to bring Slim back. Hurray!"

The roar swelled up again, and this time it didn't die. It grew steadily louder. "It's on its way," Roger said.

"Good. Now listen. You go down to where Slim's car is parked, at the end of the dock, and get into it. I'll stay out here. Tell Slim what happened, right away. He'll probably want to get right up to the cottage. If he wants me to come along, I will. But if he doesn't, and I

hear the car start up, I'll understand I'm to stay here. Tell him no boat has left the dock since I've been on watch, and that I haven't seen a thing. Got that?"

"Sure."

"Run along then." Uncle Willie gave him one more pat with his big hand, and sent him off.

Roger hurried silently down the dock and groped around in the dark until he found the handle of the car door. Then he got inside and slipped down in the seat, so he couldn't be seen.

For almost five minutes he waited, peering over once in a while, before the speedboat came into sight, her running lights casting long reflections on the water. Then the motor was throttled down, and Roger could hear voices. It seemed strange to listen to people speaking in ordinary tones, not carefully, as he himself had been talking all night long. A moment later the motor roared again and the lights swung around. Then Roger heard approaching footsteps, and finally the door on the driver's side opened.

"Slim," Roger said quietly.

Slim stood perfectly quiet, peering into the car. Gee, if it had been me, Roger thought, I'd have jumped a mile.

"Roger?" Slim asked. He slid under the wheel and closed the door. "Something wrong?"

"Nope, but-" And for the second time Roger told his story of the night's happenings.

"I see," Slim said when he had finished. He switched on the ignition and turned the car around deftly.

"What do you think about it?" Roger asked. "I think we'd better hurry up. The cliff's the next best lookout after the coast-guard station, and we should be on the job there. Besides, I want to get that license number sent to headquarters."

The car fairly leapt up the hill to the cottage, and as soon as it stopped Roger hurried out to join Bill. Slim said he'd follow as soon as he'd sent a message through.

"Boy!" Bill breathed, when Roger spoke to him over the edge of

the cliff, "I'm sure glad to see somebody. I feel as if I'd been here a thousand years. What happened?"

"Come on up here, now. We're going to watch from the tree, where the man was standing." Roger reached down a hand and hauled Bill up. "But what happened?"

"Slim's coming out here in a minute, and when he's here I'll be able to tell you. Right now we have to keep quiet and listen for that boat. You haven't noticed anything yet?"

"Not a thing."

They settled themselves in their new post, and Roger took over the binoculars to give Bill's eyes a rest-although another glance at the heavy clouds convinced him that none of the watchers would see anything tonight. They'd have to depend on their ears.

Slim joined them shortly, and Roger and Bill left him alone for a while, while Roger told his story. Bill was admiring and slightly jealous.

"Gee," he said, "and I was just sitting up here all that time-by myself."

"Well, it really wasn't much fun," Roger told him, consolingly. "And my knees hurt like anything."

"Sure. But you got to listen in on those men talking. Boy, I wish I'd been there."

When they rejoined Slim, Roger whispered, "What time is it?"

"Twelve-fifteen," Slim replied.

The boys settled down, their backs against the lone tree, and for a long time no one spoke. They were all listening so hard that Roger began to wonder if it was possible to strain your ears. If it was, they were probably all straining theirs right now, and they'd never be good for anything again.

Finally Slim said, "Roger, come back a little way with me. Will you stand guard a while alone, Bill? I want to hear this whole story through again. Maybe I missed something. That boat hasn't come in yet, and it's past due. It's nearly one o'clock now." He turned back a moment. "Bill, watch for three lit windows in a row, at the coast-guard

station. That's to be the signal if they notice anything down there."

Roger went over the whole story again, as carefully as he could. When he had finished, Slim shook his head.

"I don't get it," he muttered, "They must have meant what you thought they meant-that the boat was on its way in, and expected in an hour. But what's happened to it?"

"Maybe it's waiting offshore for something."

"Maybe. But for what? They can't be suspicious, after their lookout gave them the go-ahead signal. And when I talked to headquarters a while ago, they hadn't had any further word from our man on shipboard, so *that* part must have been all right. He can't have been mistaken when he reported to you that the bottle had gone overboard, or we'd have heard it by now. They must have come right on in. But *where are they?*"

"If the boat did come in, and we missed it," Roger said slowly, "I think I know a way we could check up and find out which boat it was."

"How?"

"By rowing around the harbor ourselves and taking a look at all the boats. If any of them have been out recently, the engine would still be warm, or we could at least tell by the smell that the oil in it had been hot."

"You could?" Slim was still for a moment, and then he said, "All right. Let's go. I suppose one of us had better stay here, just in case our boat had trouble of some sort, and still hasn't come in."

Some of the excitement died out of Roger's face. "Okay," he said. "I'll stay. Bill's been up here by himself quite a while. You take him with you. He'll be able to tell about the engines as well as I could."

So they went back to the tree, and Slim put his hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Come on," he whispered. "You and I are going places. Give Rog the binoculars." He bent over Roger. "You don't mind?"

"Of course not." He did, naturally. But Bill hadn't complained when it was his turn, so *he* couldn't complain now.

When Slim and Bill got out of the car at the Baxter house a few minutes later, Slim reached into the tool box and pulled out some rags to wrap around their oars, to muffle the sound. Then they hurried on down to the dock and got into the boat.

"I'll row," Slim said. "You tell me where to go."

"We don't have to check on Mr. Clyde's boats, do we?"

"No. I'm sure enough of them. They were all on hand when I arrived, and none of them left the basin while I was there."

"What about Old Man Tinkham's?"

"Well-let's leave him until last, anyhow. There's no use rowing out to the islands if we don't have to."

"Then let's cut right across toward the town dock-we can look at the fishing boats there, if you want, just to make sure-and then take a look at the clam boats on the other side of the bay."

"Right." Slim leaned on the oars and the light boat slid through the water rapidly. The light on the end of the town dock grew larger and brighter, and finally Bill whispered, "Take it easy. Here's the first fishing boat."

Slim lifted the oars and let the boat glide silently. A black shape loomed up in front of them, and Bill put his hand out and let the rowboat ease up against the larger craft. A moment later he had climbed aboard, and within a few seconds he was back in the rowboat, and was pushing off.

"I felt the exhaust pipe and it was stone cold," he whispered. "And then I put my head down the hatch, but there wasn't any smell of hot oil at all. I'm pretty sure that boat hasn't moved since it docked last night." Slim rowed swiftly.

"The next one's over there," Bill said, "to our left." "Just want to slip around first and tell Uncle Willie not to send in an alarm-that it's only us," Slim explained, continuing in his original direction.

As usual, Uncle Willie received the information quietly, and didn't ask any unnecessary questions.

"Good luck," he said as they shoved off. "We could use some."

Slim pulled back toward the next boat, and Bill repeated his earlier performance, almost soundlessly. The results were again negative.

One by one they checked the fishing boats, and one by one the craft were cleared of the suspicion of having sneaked out of the bay that night and come back again, without having been either seen or heard. Then they cut across the bay and checked the few clam boats, with the same results.

"I don't get it," Slim muttered, resting on his oars halfway back across the bay. "Could it be that there's a boat around here somewhere that you two don't know about?" "Where could anybody hide a boat?" Bill asked. "You couldn't carry it up on land and put it in your cellar-anyway, not a boat big enough to make an eighteen-mile trip out in the ocean."

"No, I suppose not."

"Well, Slim, you've still got another chance, haven't you? Roger told me that the day after tomorrow--"

"Any boat that got in and out of the bay tonight under our very noses, can do it again some other night," Slim pointed out. He dug the oars into the water savagely. "Oh, well. Might as well call it a night and go home."

"Do you want to go out past Tinkham's, and check his on the way?"

"Oh! Yes, I suppose we'd better." He swung around in the direction of Crab Island.

Bill could feel himself getting a new feeling of expectation. He had a feeling-a definite feeling-that Tinkham's boat would tell them something. Tinkham would be such a satisfactory person for the smuggler to turn out to be. He was such an old crab, and nobody liked him. Bill did remember then, with some embarrassment, that he had not long ago been convinced of the guilt of the Wilkens brothers. But this was different, he assured himself. This was a real hunch.

He could hardly wait to test it out now. Slim had pulled around to the dock side of the island, and was nosing in close to Tinkham's old crabbing boat. It was moored to the dock itself, and the Baxter rowboat was almost beneath the shabby wooden structure when the boats touched. Bill transferred himself silently into the other craft, and

crawled amidship to run his hands over the grease-encrusted old motor.

It was as cold as if it had never been started in years.

Bill was so angry he could feel tears starting in his eyes. Roger's jaunt earlier in the evening had at least produced some kind of results. But when *he* got a chance to help with some real detecting, nothing happened.

The crabbing boat rocked gently in a ripple, and Bill grabbed for the side to steady himself. But he missed it, and sat down unexpectedly. There was something wet in the bottom of the boat, and he could feel his clothes soak through before he could scramble to his feet again.

"The sloppy old man," Bill said to himself between clenched teeth. "Why doesn't he keep his old boat bailed out? I hope he sinks some day."

He whispered a quiet "Nope," to Slim as he got back in the rowboat, and they both sat staring grimly ahead all the way home.

They picked up Uncle Willie at the dock, and a little while later the boys were both dropped off in front of the Baxter house. They had had a final conference, to compare their sadly uninformative notes, and none of them had spoken much on the ride home. Uncle Willie had brought them down in Slim's car, so that Slim could take over Roger's lookout job.

"Might as well stay here until it gets light," Slim had said sourly. "Then we'll at least know we've done everything we could."

"For heaven's sakes get right into bed," Uncle Willie cautioned them as he left. "If your mother ever finds out how late I've let you stay up-" And he drove off muttering.

The boys got ready for bed, neither of them speaking.

"Gee, I'm sure tired," Bill said, when he'd crawled in between the covers, "But I don't think I'll ever go to sleep."

"Me, too," Roger muttered. "Imagine how Slim feels. Do you suppose he ever failed on a job before?"

He waited for Bill's answer.

"Do you?" he repeated.

And then he looked over at his brother. Bill was breathing evenly, gently, oblivious to the world.

Roger sank back, disgusted. How *could* he sleep, when there was so much to think about? What had happened, anyway? Had the boat never gone out at all, or had it gone and come back unseen and unheard? Or- And then Roger was asleep, too.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Roger opened the door of the refrigerator and looked inside. "What'll it be? Bacon and eggs or cereal? Or bacon and eggs *and* cereal?"

Bill looked up from the oranges he was squeezing. "Just bacon and eggs, I guess. I'm not so very hungry. I guess we should have eaten something when we got home last night. I feel as if I'm almost out of the habit."

"When you get out of the habit of eating, the world will be fiat and the law of gravity will be repealed. How many eggs?"

Bill ignored that loftily. "Just two. You don't fry eggs as well as Mom does. I'll be glad when she gets home. D'you think she'll come today?"

"It depends on how Aunt Martha is, I guess. But it's sort of a good thing she wasn't at home to see how late we got in last night."

"How late we got in this morning, you mean," Bill corrected him. "And all for nothing, too."

"Not entirely," a voice said from the doorway, and Slim came in. "Good-food! What's for lunch and am I invited?"

"Lunch! This is breakfast," Bill told him.

"Breakfast for you, Bill my boy, but lunch for me. I have been up and doing for several hours."

"Doing what?" Roger asked, his feeling of discouragement lifting a

little.

"Well, finding out who owned that car your friend got into last night." Slim smiled as the boys turned on him excitedly.

"Does it belong to a criminal?" Bill wanted to know.

"No. But it belongs to a New York diamond merchant- which is just as interesting from our point of view. Of course, we don't know whether he was driving it himself or not, but still it all helps. The owner will be shadowed from now on, and we may be able to discover some other interesting facts about him to add to our knowledge of where his car was last night."

"Gee, that's something, all right," Bill commented happily. "What are we going to do tomorrow night, Slim? Have lookouts, like we did last night? I know! Why don't we put mines all over the bay, and blow the smugglers up when they come in?"

"Very effective, no doubt," Slim said, helping himself to Bill's glass of orange juice. "Thank you. But rather messy, don't you think? I'd rather arrest criminals all in one piece."

Bill cut open two more oranges resignedly. "I wish you felt the same way about my orange juice as you do about my ideas," he muttered.

Roger finished turning the bacon and drained off the fat. "Seriously, Slim, what will happen tomorrow night?"

But Duckfoot scratched at the door just then, and Slim let him in. "This is the hungriest family," he marveled, as the dog hurried over to sniff at his empty dish under the table.

Bill picked it up and got some food for him out of the refrigerator.

"Mom always said that the reason Duckfoot and Bill got along together so well, was because they both thought food was the most important thing in the world," Roger pointed out. And then he added, pointedly eyeing Slim as the detective set another place for himself at the table, "but it seems to me there are other people who feel that way, too."

"And we're right, aren't we, Duckfoot?" Slim grinned as he bent down to scratch the dog behind the ears.

"I changed my mind, Rog," Bill said. "I'll have some cereal after all."

"That, I expected." Roger put three full bowls down on the table. "I got it all ready for you."

A few minutes later they were all at the table.

"Roger," Slim said, spooning sugar reflectively out of the sugar bowl, "tell me all over again just what happened last night, from the time you saw the man on the cliff until you met me in the car. Can you bear to go through it again?"

"Sure." And Roger went over the story carefully, between mouthfuls.

When he had finished they were silent a few minutes. Bill had already eaten the last of his breakfast, and *he* leaned back with a satisfied expression.

"I feel better," he announced cheerfully.

"You say that the man you were following cut right across the clearing around the cottage?" Slim asked, still intent on what Roger had been saying. "You're sure of that?"

Roger nodded.

"What difference would it make, how he went?" Bill was beginning to take an interest in the conversation again.

"Maybe none, of course," Slim mused. "But suppose you'd been doing his job. Would you have come that way, or would you have kept to the edge of the woods, so you surely couldn't be seen?"

"I guess I'd have kept to the edge of the woods," Bill admitted. "But he'd probably found out that the cottage was the only house up there, and that you weren't home. Maybe he looked around when he first went up to the cliff."

"Even so, he wouldn't have known I hadn't come back while he was out at his post."

"Unless he'd heard some place about Mr. Clyde's party, and that you were going to be out there," Roger suggested.

"Exactly." Slim swallowed the last of his milk, and got out his

pipe. "Exactly. And where would he have heard that? I checked up and discovered that no strange man visited the store or the gas station or any of the other places in town last night, where information about the party might have been picked up."

The boys both looked thoughtful.

"I suppose the smuggler-the one who lives around here, whoever he is-found out about it and told him," Bill said finally.

"Clyde himself, of course," Slim said casually, "would have all the details. He'd know when I was leaving the house, and how long I was going to be gone."

Roger looked up sharply. "Do you mean you think maybe Mr. Clyde has something to do with-with the smuggling?"

"Of course he doesn't," Bill scoffed. "We eliminated him."

Slim shook his head slowly. "No," he said, "we still haven't eliminated him. We eliminated his boats-twice. Once last night, and once when we discovered the speedboat had never had oarlocks on it. But we've still never eliminated Mr. Clyde. I'm not saying I'm convinced he's got anything to do with it," he added quickly, "but I do say it looks a little queer. Maybe I was invited out to Smugglers' Island last night just so I wouldn't be at home. In any case," he sat up straighter, "Mr. Clyde is the subject of a pretty thorough investigation right now."

"Gee," Roger said quietly, "I can't believe *he'd* have anything to do with stuff like that. But I suppose you never can tell. Slim, you never did tell us what your plans are for tomorrow night."

"No, I didn't." Slim drew on his pipe. "As a matter of fact, we're not sure yet. We'll wait until the last possible moment to make our plans, in the hope that we'll have some more information to go on. Apparently a boat got past us last night, in spite of all our care. We can't afford to let that happen again-even if we have to send a dozen men out in rowboats to sit at the mouth of the inlet and catch any boat that comes in."

"Say, that's a swell idea!" Bill applauded. "Why didn't we think of that before?"

Slim smiled wearily. "It's not a swell idea at all," he said. "Because if that's what we have to do, we run a great risk of being seen

ourselves first. And if that happens, the smugglers will undoubtedly just throw the jewels overboard, and we'll have no case. Remember-I told you we had to avoid that sort of thing? But at the moment I don't know what else we can try. If our rowboats *aren't* seen, of course, the incoming boat could be followed to its dock, wherever that is, and the men arrested there. But it's a big chance to take, and I don't like it much."

The ringing of the telephone drowned out his last word, and Bill ran to answer it.

"It's Mom!" he called out a moment later, and Roger hurried to join him at the phone.

When they came back into the kitchen Slim asked, "How's your aunt?"

"She's getting better," Roger told him, "but I guess she was pretty sick after all. Anyway, Mom thinks she'd better stay there another couple of days. She-uh-she asked us quite a lot of questions, but she didn't happen to ask anything we couldn't answer without worrying her."

Slim looked serious.

"She sent you her regards, Slim," Bill added, "and she told you to take care of yourself and to take care of us, too."

"Yes. I intend to." Slim got up resolutely. "I'm sorry you were kept up so late last night, but we'll see that that doesn't happen again. Whatever our plans are for tomorrow night, you boys won't be part of them."

"What!" Bill wailed.

"But Slim," Roger said, "*we want* to help. And we-"

"I know. But I meant what I said. And I'd decided that before your mother's call, too. There might just possibly be some unpleasantness tomorrow night, and I'd just as soon you two didn't get in the way of something intended for somebody else."

"You mean--a bullet?" Bill asked.

"What did you think he meant?" Roger asked scathingly. He turned to Slim. "We understand, Slim. We'll do anything you say-even

sit in here with the doors all locked, if you want us to."

Slim nodded. "Thanks. I knew you'd understand. I couldn't face either your mother or myself later on, if I'd been the cause of getting you boys into any real danger."

Bill got up and began to clear things off the table. "I understand, all right," he muttered. "But I don't have to like it." He knocked a spoon off the table and bent down to pick it up.

Roger grabbed at him as he began to move away. "Hey, come back here. What did you do to your pants? Boy, now Mom is going to be mad at us!"

Bill craned his neck in an effort to see the seat of his trousers. "I didn't do anything to them," he said.

"Well, somebody did." Roger was examining the big tears that had caught his eye a moment before. "That's funny. I thought you'd probably caught them on something, but these aren't rips. They're holes. Looks as if the cloth had been eaten away by some kind of acid."

"Where would I get acid?" Bill demanded. He had caught a glimpse of the damage himself now, and was definitely alarmed.

"You probably shouldn't go around sitting on storage batteries, Bill," Slim said. "Don't worry. If you ruined them in the cause of building the generator, they're my responsibility, and I'll replace them. Mrs. Baxter will understand."

"But I don't sit on storage batteries," Bill said indignantly. "And besides, when could it have happened? They were all right yesterday-or one of you would have noticed me."

"Somebody would have noticed you, that's sure," Roger agreed. "Well, go on upstairs and change them-and be a little more careful in the future."

With a backward glance and a mutter to the effect that he *was* careful, Bill clumped out of the room. Slim and Roger exchanged a grin, and set to work clearing the table and washing the dishes.

Roger was just lifting the last plate out of the soapy water when he suddenly swung around to face Slim. The plate dropped from his soapy fingers and crashed on the floor, but he didn't even glance down

at it.

"Jumping catfish!" he shouted. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" Slim stared at him.

"How they did it!" Roger ran to the foot of the stairs. "Bill! Come down here quick-and bring those pants with you."

"Which pants?" Bill called back. "The ones I'm putting on?"

"No! The ones with the holes in them. Hurry up!"

He grabbed them out of Bill's hands before his brother reached the bottom step. "Look," he said to Slim, spreading the ruined garment out on the kitchen table. "Are these acid marks, or aren't they?"

"Well, they do look like it to me," Slim said, staring first at the holes and then curiously at Roger. "But what--?"

"And didn't you tell me you slipped in old Tinkham's boat last night and got all wet?" Roger interrupted him to demand of Bill.

"Sure I did. But sea water isn't acid."

"It is if it's got battery acid mixed with it," Roger announced triumphantly. But the others continued to stare at him uncomprehendingly.

"You're crazy," Bill told him. "There wouldn't be any battery acid in that boat just by accident. It hasn't even got an ignition battery-it's got a magneto. Old Man Tink-ham doesn't like us, but he isn't silly enough to pour acid in his boat just in the hope that one of us will come and sit down in it."

"No, he isn't." Roger was elaborately patient. "But, listen. D'you remember, Bill, you once said maybe the smugglers were using a submarine to get in and out of the inlet with?"

"Sure I do." Bill's eyes widened. "Do you think that's what they do? Really?"

"No, of course not. But submarines have electric motors driven by storage batteries, don't they? So why couldn't Tinkham figure out a way to take that old noisy motor out of his boat, and install a bank of storage batteries and an electric motor instead? Then his boat would be silent, wouldn't it?"

"Gee!" Bill breathed.

Slim stared at Roger a long moment, and then he slapped him on the back so hard the boy almost fell over. "Roger! I'll bet that's it! I'll bet you have got it!" He began to do an Indian war dance around the kitchen table, much to Duckfoot's annoyance. Every time he passed Roger he clapped him on the shoulder again.

"Gee," Bill repeated excitedly, and Roger just grinned.

"We'll do a little checking up tonight," Slim said finally, coming to a halt. "But something tells me > we're not going to be disappointed."

He rounded the table once more, for good measure, and this time Duckfoot, apparently having decided it was some new kind of game, followed after him, barking joyously. But he stopped and stared around with a hurt expression when Slim and the boys burst into laughter.

"It's all right, Duckfoot," Slim told him. "We're not laughing at you. We're just laughing because we feel good."

* * *

At ten o'clock that night Roger, Bill and Slim were sitting in the Baxter rowboat, ready to shove off. The oars were muffled, and when Slim dipped them into the water the boat moved forward without a sound. Roger, in the bow, sent directions back in a whisper, and in twenty minutes the dark mass of Crab Island loomed close beside them.

In accordance with the plan they had formulated that afternoon, Slim eased the boat around the island to the boat landing. There he stopped and for several moments they sat in absolute silence, listening for any sound that would indicate a presence above them on the pier. Only when they were perfectly sure that no one had seen or heard their approach, did Slim send the boat forward again.

Roger waited in the bow with outstretched hands, and braced them against the barnacled surface of the supporting timbers of the dock to keep the boat from bumping. Then he carefully pulled and guided the rowboat until it was directly beneath the dock. Once more they sat still and listened. Only a faint throbbing noise reached them—a sound that might come from an engine well-muffled and heavily covered.

Slowly then they urged the rowboat forward toward the shore, keeping it beneath the dock for protection. As they moved, the throbbing sound grew slightly louder. Finally the boat touched the rocks and Roger held it there.

Slim stood up in the boat and took the dim flashlight from his pocket. Carefully he turned its subdued glow around them, first on either side and then upward, toward the flooring of the pier about six feet over their heads.

"Look," Roger said softly, "there's a sort of railing fastened to the timbers up there."

"Looks like a railroad track upside down," Bill whispered.

"We'll talk later," Slim told them. "Now we'll just look."

They tied the boat to one of the heavy timbers, and began to climb carefully ashore over the rocks. The wooden pier was over them like a heavy ceiling, and it made them feel as if they were walking in a cave. The ground kept rising under them, and when they had gone about twenty feet, even Bill could reach the flooring over their heads, and Slim had to walk doubled over. The iron railing continued on, hung from the wooden structure.

Suddenly Slim, who was in the lead, stopped. The boys stopped too, and in the silence they could hear the throbbing very plainly. It seemed to be coming from just ahead of them somewhere.

Cautiously Slim moved forward another step, then two, then three. Then he stopped again.

He turned the flashlight on and in its light they could all see an iron door right ahead of them, seeming to lead into the solid rock. But closer inspection proved that the rock formation was not natural, but a man-made structure of boulders carefully cemented together. It was from behind the door that the throbbing came.

Slim put his hand on the door and shoved gently. Slowly the heavy iron swung inward, and immediately the throbbing grew louder.

Slim looked through the partially opened door for a long time, and finally he moved forward again, motioning the boys to wait. They stood still, watching his faint red light glowing here and there. It shifted to the right and then to the left, and seemed to go quite a

distance forward.

Then finally it approached them again, and Slim was closing the door as silently as he had opened it.

None of them even whispered until Crab Island had been left some distance behind in the darkness.

"What a setup," Slim murmured then quietly, holding the oars out of the water and allowing the boat to drift gently. "And you were absolutely right, Roger. There's a huge bank of storage batteries in there, and a gasoline engine generator to charge them. The batteries and an electric motor are mounted on a platform right under the far end of that iron railing that runs out to the end of the dock. So it's easy to see how it all works: they must bring the crab boat under the pier, where we brought this one, and lift the whole engine out with a chain hoist running on wheels along the rail. They roll it back into that shed, and roll out the platform with the batteries and motor on it, and lower that into the boat instead. The motor is probably connected to the drive shaft of the boat-and there they are, all ready."

"No wonder nobody heard the boat come in," Bill said. "I guess it wouldn't make any noise at all."

"No wonder," Slim nodded. "But tomorrow night it won't matter whether we hear it or not. We can be right there waiting for them when they bring the diamonds back. You're a bright boy, Roger."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Early the next evening, Roger and Bill were allowed to sit in on an exciting planning session that took place in the back of Uncle Willie's store, behind drawn shades. There were six strange men present-associates of Slim's, who had slipped quietly into town during the past hour. If they were seen, their presence would arouse suspicion, of course. But Slim had decided that it was a chance that must be taken. If the smugglers weren't apprehended tonight, who knew when there would be another opportunity to do so?

Now they were sitting around on upturned boxes, nibbling at Uncle Willie's cookie barrel as if they were Bill's age. But the boys could sense the strength and determination back of their quiet voices, and they were tense themselves with excitement. Part of their

excitement was owing to the fact that Slim had reluctantly agreed to let them play a minor role in the evening's job-at least, in the job to be done during the earlier part of the evening.

Now they were all listening intently as Slim went over the plan of action.

"We're assuming that the man named Doc-the one Roger heard being mentioned-is aboard the *Regina*," he said. "That's the only liner coming past here tonight, so that seems a safe enough assumption. It's due, according to our most recent information, about eleven-forty-five. So we expect the Tinkham boat to leave Crab Island about ten."

Slim looked at his watch. "That's fifteen minutes from now. However, I won't risk landing on the island until after eleven, just to be on the safe side. At eleven Roger and Bill and I will leave the Baxter dock and row over there. If anybody should be curious, we're out for a little night fishing. They'll drop me off on the island, at the side opposite the dock and the underground shed, and I'll take a look around. And in the meantime the boys," he turned to grin at them, "will head for home immediately. And they'll stay there."

They grinned ruefully back at him. "Sure," Roger said, "we'll stay there all right."

"But I still don't think it's fair," Bill added. He was resigned to the situation by this time, but he just couldn't bear to let the opportunity for one more complaint escape him.

"You boys have plenty of years ahead of you to risk your necks in," one of the men pointed out. "Anyhow, don't you think you've done enough already?"

"Nope," Bill answered immediately, and the others grinned.

Slim brought the subject back to the program.

"I'll look the island over," he explained, "and if the coast is clear-if there's nobody there-I'll signal you and you can all come right on over and be on hand for the crab boat's return. Three short flashes will mean to come ahead immediately."

"And if the coast isn't clear-if there's somebody on guard-what then?" a cheerful red-headed member of the group asked.

"I'll clear it-if I can," Slim said. "Of course we know there must be

several men mixed up in this ring, but how many of them are on hand when a job is pulled, we don't know. If there's one man left on the island, I ought to be able to take care of him, and then signal to you to come over. If there's more than one man, I won't take any risks. I'll keep under cover, and signal to you from under the rocks at the end of the island. I don't think the rest of you should take a chance of coming over in that case. You might be seen, and a signal flashed to the crab boat not to come in at all-or to get rid of the gems. I'll lay low until the crab boat comes in, and *then* signal to you, and you come as quickly and as quietly as you can. Three flashes, whenever you see them, will mean to come ahead. Five flashes will mean to await another signal. All right?"

"But suppose something slips up, and you don't get a chance to signal at all? When do you want us to come then?"

Slim sat silent for a moment, mentally calculating the smugglers' probable timetable. "If the *Regina* comes by on schedule, at eleven-forty-five, and the crab boat is on hand, it will probably take at least another half hour to pick up the bottle. They'll have to wait until the liner has gone by, and the water has settled down enough for them to find it. Give them another two hours for the return trip. That will make it two-fifteen. So let's leave it this way: if you haven't heard anything from me by two-thirty, come ahead-but take it easy."

"That doesn't sound too good to me, Slim," the redhead murmured. "If you're not able to get in touch with us-well, a lot can happen between eleven and two-thirty."

"A lot can happen to me, you mean, I suppose." Slim grinned briefly. "I know that. But any other plan is too risky. I might be unable to signal, and still be perfectly safe. And if you came tearing over, you might ruin everything. Even if the worst happened, and I were caught, they wouldn't do much more than hold me there until the boat got in. And by that time you'd be on your way anyhow, and could take over before anything very serious occurred."

"All right," the other agreed slowly. "This is your case, and you're the boss, but I wish there were some other way."

"Don't worry," Slim told him. "We still have the element of surprise on our side." He stood up. "Everything clear, then? Three flashes means come right over. Five flashes means to hold off until you get a subsequent three-flash signal. And if you receive no signal at all, by two-thirty, come ahead anyway."

"Good enough, Slim," a quiet middle-aged man said. "Now that we're sure the smugglers aren't using the town dock, we'll station Jenkins there in the car, with the receiver turned on. Headquarters will keep in touch with us constantly, in case they get any news back there."

Slim smiled at the short squat Jenkins. "No music on that radio, remember. It might wake up the neighbors."

He turned to Uncle Willie. "That boat you got for us is all set, isn't it?"

Uncle Willie nodded. "It's a good thing I've borrowed Gal's boat for night fishing before, or he might be curious. I just hope it isn't too noisy."

"They won't use the engine on the way over," Slim pointed out. "There's enough manpower here to row a battleship."

"Oh, sure. We'll manage," the red-head told him. "You just look out for yourself."

"Okay." Slim looked around, and his eyes came to rest last on Roger and Bill. "Ready?" he asked.

When the three of them reached the Baxter house, Slim said, "There's time for a glass of milk. How about it?"

"I'm not hungry," Bill said.

"What!" Slim stared. "Sure you are. There's nothing like milk to keep your strength up." He opened the refrigerator door leisurely and took out the milk bottle. And when he had poured the three glasses full, he drank his so slowly that both the boys were finished long before he was.

Bill prowled nervously around the kitchen, and finally filled Duckfoot's dish with food. Duckfoot stared at him in surprise a moment, and then ate hastily, as if afraid that Bill might suddenly realize that he had given him an extra meal, and take it away again.

Slim rinsed out his glass carefully and put it back on the shelf, and then he looked at his watch.

"Well, we might as well get along," he said then. "We want to allow ourselves plenty of time." He felt in his pockets and checked

over his heavy leather gloves, his flashlight, and the ugly automatic pistol that Roger had first seen hidden beneath clothes in Slim's bureau drawer. Then he motioned the boys out ahead of him, turned off the kitchen light, and followed them into the night.

The sky was clear, but there was a stiff breeze coming in from the ocean—a breeze that seemed to come in spurts, each one a little stronger than the one before.

"I'll row," Slim said. "Looks a little choppy. Hope you boys don't have any trouble getting back. I don't suppose I should be letting you do this."

"Oh, this is nothing," Roger assured him hastily. "We've been out in lots worse winds."

"And we'll have the wind at our back coming home," Bill added.

They had a little difficulty getting into the bouncing boat, but Slim pulled hard at the oars and managed to keep it headed straight for Crab Island.

"Glad we're doing this now instead of next December," he said after a few moments, as the wind skimmed the top off a wave and spattered it against them.

"Pull harder on your right," Roger advised.

"Right." Slim rowed in silence for another five minutes. "This wind must be blowing us backward," he grunted then. "We ought to be there by now."

"Want us to take the oars a while?" Bill asked.

"I'll manage. And anyway, we'd be blown halfway home again in the time it took us to change seats."

"Easy," Roger cautioned a little later. "We're getting close. Bear to the left a little, to hit that spot between the two big rocks."

"Hope we don't pile up. This wind's getting stronger every minute."

"We're nearly there." The boat lifted and fell, and they could hear the sucking sounds the waves made as they rushed forward between the rocks and then pulled back again.

"Got ill" Roger said, grabbing for a jutting stone and hanging on tightly.

Slim pulled the oars rapidly into the boat. "Can you hold on until I climb out?"

"Sure. But hurry up," Roger panted.

Slim wriggled past him, found a footing, and then, crouching on shore, leaned over to hold the boat himself a moment. "Think you can make it back all right?"

"Sure. Don't worry about us. Be careful. And don't forget you promised to stop in and tell us all about it afterward."

Slim touched his shoulder. "Don't worry. I will. Beat it, now, and I'll see you later." He let go of the boat and began to climb up the rocks. He was out of sight before Bill had settled in the rowing seat and taken up the oars.

"Okay," Bill said. "Let go."

Roger pushed the boat away from the rock and Bill pulled on the oars in the same instant. But an incoming wave caught the stern and twisted it around to crack smartly against a half-submerged stone.

Roger turned quickly and grabbed for another handhold. "Come here and take this, Bill. Maybe I can manage it."

Bill pulled the oars in again and crawled forward to join his brother. "But what if I can't hold it at all?"

"Try. Right here. Put your hands over mine. This is a pretty good place to hang on."

They were both talking in little gasps.

Roger half slipped, half fell into the rowing seat. "Ready?"

"Go!"

Bill shoved with all his might, and Roger dug the oars deep with all his weight. For an instant it looked as if he could make it, but a huge swell poured in between the rocks just as they thought they were free, lifted the boat high and dropped it with a crash.

"Rog! The bow's smashed! Water's coming in!"

Roger threw the oars on the bottom of the boat and crawled forward. He could feel the water on his feet, surging around as the boat twisted and turned. He ran his fingers over the planking.

"She's split, all right. We'll never make it now."

"What'll we do?"

"Get out of here before it sinks. Here-grab hold of the mooring line and take it up with you. Maybe we can tie it some place and save the boat. Go ahead-I'm holding on."

The rocks were slippery and Bill was thankful for his rubber soles as he fought for a foothold.

"Okay," he said finally. "I'm up. Come on."

There was a tug on the line that nearly pulled Bill over the edge, as Roger let go his hold on the boat and began to climb out himself. The rope cut his hands, but Bill held on grimly until he felt Roger beside him.

"I'll take it," Roger gasped. "Relax a minute. Then we'll both try and yank her out of the water."

Bill swallowed huge gulps of air and rubbed his hands, and then said, "All right. Let's go."

"When I say three," Roger muttered. "Ready-one! Two! Three!"

Together they heaved, and they could feel the boat rise several feet, scraping against the rocks.

"Again! One-two-three!"

Four more times they threw their full weight against the line and hauled in, before they felt the boat securely caught, so that it didn't slip back when they let the line go slack.

"She must be wedged in the rocks," Roger said, sinking down on the ground. "But at least the water isn't pounding her to bits." After a moment he crawled forward and looked down at her. "Yep. She's all right. I hope, anyway."

When Bill could get his breath he said, "And what about us? What are we supposed to do? Hey-don't stand up! There are enough lights in Seaview so that anybody behind us could see us against them."

"Yeah," Roger said. "You're right. Let's find something to tie the boat to, and then get away from here a little bit." They felt around in the darkness until they found a projection of rock they could loop the mooring line around. Then, bent over low, they walked some distance from the sea, where they crouched down in among scrub bushes. "Keep your voice low," Roger cautioned. "We don't know what's going on around here."

"Whatever it is, I don't think I like it much," Bill whispered. "Gee-I was brave enough back at Uncle Willie's. But now that we're out here, I wish we were at home."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Don't pull a crybaby act on me," Roger said sharply. He hoped Bill wouldn't guess how scared he was himself.

"I'm not. But what *are* we going to do?"

"Well, if we can't get off the island, we'll have to stay on it."

"Boy!" Bill whispered sarcastically. "That's what I call really figuring something out."

"Well, how do I know yet what we're going to do? We have to decide. I guess we'd better stay right here and try to catch Slim when he comes back to signal. Then we can ask him what to do."

"Suppose we miss him?"

"We won't miss him. We'll just keep watching."

"But suppose he doesn't come back at all? Suppose something happens to him?"

"Sure he'll come back." That didn't sound as convincing as Roger had hoped it would, even to his own ears, so he added nonchalantly, "and if he doesn't, we'll just wait here until two-thirty, when the men come over anyway."

"Yeah, I guess so," Bill agreed. "But I still wish I were at home."

"Well, you're not. So keep quiet and wait." There was only the

sound of the water fighting the rocks below to keep them company, and the minutes dragged endlessly. Far off across the water, they could see the lights of the town, and the one dim glow that marked the end of the fishing dock. But the lights might just as well have been in distant China for all the comfort they gave.

It occurred to both the boys, but neither of them said it aloud, that they had felt lonely and a little scared while they were watching from the cliff beyond the cottage two nights before; but now the cliff seemed like a friendly, cosy place, in comparison to this windswept rocky island, where unknown figures and unknown events might be lying in wait for them.

"Gosh, we've been here a long time," Bill whispered finally.

But Roger only replied, "Sh-h-h," and they both lapsed into silence again.

Suddenly there was a pause in the wind, and faintly from the direction of Seaview they could hear the town clock striking its long low notes.

"It must be twelve o'clock," Roger said quickly, before Bill could say it first and make a wail out of it.

"That means Slim's been gone about an hour. D'you think--"

"I think Slim's smart, and I don't think he got caught, if that's what you mean," Roger broke in. "But lots of other things might have happened."

"Such as?"

"How do" I know? Lots of things. He-" His whisper died in mid-air and he grabbed Bill's arm. "I think I hear voices," he added a moment later, breathing the words against Bill's ear.

They sat without moving a muscle for what seemed like years, but no sound came to them over the wind-and-water noises.

At long last Bill said faintly, "I didn't hear any-" But Roger interrupted him with a hand over his mouth.

And this time Bill heard a voice, too. There was a tiny beam of light flashed somewhere off to the right for a moment, and then the noise of a shoe scraping against stone.

And then, distinctly, they heard a harsh low voice mutter, "Keep that light off. And don't get so excited. As far as that guy is concerned, we don't have to worry about him any longer. He'll keep, right where he is."

Bill felt his heart jump up into his throat, and he clutched Roger's arm with frightened fingers.

"I know he'll keep." This was a second voice, lighter than the first, and with a peevish, whining quality. "But I don't want to have the responsibility if the boys come in with the boat and find him here."

"Well, we're not going to take the responsibility. I told you. I'll row over to Clyde's place now and ask him what to do. He knows the guy."

Clyde! Bill's fingers tightened on Roger's arm, and he could feel his brother stiffen. So Clyde *was* in on it!

"All right," the whining voice was saying. "But remember-if they don't like it, you're the one to blame. I wouldn't have touched him when he came in. Maybe he just got lost and wandered up here. Maybe he didn't know a thing. We could have told him to clear out, and then if he didn't go, we'd have been in the clear, whatever we did."

"Oh, sure," the harsh voice sneered. "We should have just let him walk in the shed and make himself at home. Maybe we should have offered him a cup of tea! I suppose that gun he had with him just proves he was a fisherman lost in the storm."

The men were faintly visible now, between the boys and the shore, and they were walking directly toward the spot where the mooring line was made fast. The boys held their breath. Suddenly there was a grunt.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"I tripped over something." The light flashed on again for a second. "Hey! A rope? Where does it go?"

The light flashed on again as the men traced the line to the edge of the rocks.

"Well, now we know how he got on the island, anyhow. There's his boat."

"How'd you think he got here? Swimming?"

"No. But you're so suspicious of him, I figured you thought he'd been dropped off by a coast-guard cutter, or a federal agent's boat, and that they were on their way back with reserves."

"That's very funny. Ha-ha. I'm laughing. Well, what are you going to do? Stand here all night? Or are you going over to Clyde's, like you said?"

"I'm going."

The figures began to move away.

"Okay. I'll wait for you in the house."

The voices grew fainter. Roger nudged Bill and put his mouth close to his brother's ear. "Come on. But keep quiet."

"What are-?"

"Don't talk. Follow me."

Moving carefully, Roger led the way in the direction the men had taken. Within a few minutes, they could see the lights of Tinkham's cottage, and suddenly the figures ahead of them loomed against the bright windows in silhouette. They looked immense.

Instinctively the boys stopped in their tracks, and once more they could hear the men's voices clearly.

"I'll be in here when you come back."

"I don't care where you'll be. But it'll take me at least half an hour to row over and back in this wind, so don't get impatient."

One of the shadowy figures went toward the house then, and the other continued on toward the pier. After a moment of indecision, Roger pulled Bill after him toward the house. They skirted it widely, to avoid the light shining through the windows. Behind them, they could hear the rattle of oarlocks, and the sound of clumsy rowing that soon grew fainter as the boat moved farther away toward Smugglers' Island.

When the two boys reached the dark side of the house, they moved in closer, and continued, one behind the other, hugging the wall. Slowly they edged around a corner and toward a lighted

window.

Roger stopped beside it, motioned Bill to keep back, and then cautiously poked his head forward until he could see in. After a moment he ducked back again, grabbed Bill, and led him back the way they had come.

"What'd you see?" Bill whispered, when they were some distance from the house.

"He's reading a paper-the man we saw go inside. Nobody's with him. I saw Slim's gun on the table-anyway I think it was his. *Come on*, now. We've got to hurry." And he started forward again in the direction of the pier.

"What are we going to do?"

"See if we can get Slim out. They must have him in the shed, but they didn't sound as if they'd hurt him."

"How do you know we can get in?"

"I don't. But we can try. Maybe the door's only locked on the outside, and we can open it. But we have to do *something* before that man gets back from Clyde's."

"Rog-do you really think Mr. Clyde's in on it-the smuggling, I mean?"

"It certainly sounds like it. But don't argue now-come on."

Bill grabbed Roger's arm. "But listen-maybe we shouldn't try to tackle this ourselves. Maybe we ought to signal back to Seaview, like Slim was going to. You know -send three flashes, so the men'll come over."

"And what'll we signal with? That's one of the reasons we've got to get Slim out of there. Maybe he's still got his flashlight."

"We could start a fire, maybe, by rubbing sticks together."

"The last time we tried that it took us half an hour. Besides, we don't dare start a fire in this wind. It would get out of control in a couple of minutes-and then that man in the house would see it, too. No, I told you: what we have to do is get Slim out. *Come on*."

They had been huddled at the shore end of the pier, talking

quickly, impatiently, in low whispers. But now Roger pulled Bill down the rocks with him, and Bill followed without further argument. Within a few moments they had found the heavy iron door that Slim had gone through on his exploring expedition the night before.

Roger began to feel cautiously over the surface.

"I've got it!" he whispered tensely. "The door's barred from this side. Feel it? This big bar here. Now if we can just slide it back without making too much noise."

Together they pushed. The bar squeaked once, and they both stopped, holding their breath, but they knew the sound couldn't have been heard as far away as the house. They pushed again, and the bar slid free.

They shoved the door open only far enough to slip through, and then Roger closed it quickly behind him. There was a dim glow in the interior, from a low-burning candle, and by its light he discovered that there was another bar on the inner door, by which it could be locked from that side. He moved it into place.

"Now they can't get in here right away, even if they want to," he whispered almost to himself, as he turned around to look for Slim.

For a moment they could see very little in the faintly lit interior. At the far end of the long narrow room was the generating plant used to charge the batteries that drove the boat. There were no batteries on the rack now. In the center, resting on a heavy timber frame, was the old one-cylinder engine that propelled Tinkham's crab boat during its legitimate day-time runs.

"There!" Bill pointed to a corner, where he had glimpsed a pair of feet protruding from a sprawling tarpaulin. Both the boys went toward them, and Roger, his hand shaking, reached forward to pull off the cover.

It was Slim, all right. He was lying on the damp earth, his hands and feet securely tied with light line.

"Slim," Roger said softly, "it's us. Bill and me."

There was no answer. The boys knelt and carefully turned Slim over. His eyes were closed.

"Is he-?" Bill couldn't finish the question. Cold clammy fingers

seemed to be tightening around his heart, so that, he couldn't breathe at all.

Roger put his ear down on Slim's chest.

When he lifted his head he said, "He's only unconscious, I guess. Anyway, his heart's beating. Let's get these ropes off. Maybe he'll come to then."

Feverishly they began to work at the knots. Bill noticed a rusty knife on an upturned box near by, and they used that to saw at the more stubborn ones.

But when Slim was finally freed, he continued to lie there limply, his eyes shut.

"What'll we do?" Bill asked. "Rog, we have to get help. Maybe he's really hurt bad."

"D'you see his flashlight around anywhere?"

They made a hasty tour of the room, taking the candle with them into the dark corners, but there was no sign of the flash.

Roger finally stood still in the middle of the room, his face grim.

"I think we ought to build a fire, like I said." Bill's voice was pleading.

"Nope. The man in the house would get here before Slim's men did. We can't risk that. It would ruin all their plans, and it wouldn't help Slim anyway." He took his sweater off and folded it up to put under Slim's head. Then he stood over him, staring down at the pale blank face. "Think," he muttered, to himself as much as to Bill. "Think. How can we get a message to town some way that'll be safe-and fast?"

"Maybe we ought to just carry Slim out of here and hide him somewhere else on the island. Then they couldn't hurt him again anyhow."

Roger shook his head impatiently. "They'd find him five minutes after they discovered he was gone. Kow big do you think this island is? No. He's safer in here, anyway, as long as we keep that door locked on this side."

"I wish our boat hadn't smashed," Bill said after a moment. "Then

we could get him away, all right."

"Why don't you wish for a radio transmitter while you're about it?" Roger demanded angrily. "Can't you get it through your head that what we have to do is *think*, not just stand here wishing we-" He stopped suddenly. "Radio transmitter," he repeated slowly. "Radio transmitter."

Suddenly he ran over to the boat engine and examined it carefully. Then he turned to the work bench that stood along one side of the room, and picked up several small coils of wire evidently used in connecting the batteries to the generator.

"Radio trahsmitter!" he said once more, and this time there was tremendous excitement in his voice. "Maybe we *can* get a message across 1 Come here, Bill-quick!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Bill stood staring speechlessly as Roger bent down and peered under the work bench, to come up with a battered tool box.

"Come on!" Roger repeated. "Don't just stand there. Give me a hand with this." He had a wrench in his hand and was removing the bolts that fastened the magneto to the boat engine.

Bill moved toward him slowly, his eyes wide. "But what are you doing? This is no time to start fooling around, when--"

"Wake up, chump," Roger interrupted impatiently. "What does a magneto do on an engine? Makes sparks, doesn't it?"

"Sure. But-" Automatically he held the magneto while Roger withdrew the last bolt. "Rog, you're going to get that engine all out of time. They'll never get it started again."

"As if I cared! Look: if we can make sparks, we can send messages, can't we? They used sparks for the first wireless transmitters. Remember?"

"Jumping codfish I" And now Bill came suddenly alive, too. "I thought you were going crazy. Is *that* what you're going to do? Do you know how?"

"I know enough. I hope." Roger carried the magneto over to the bench, and went back to the engine to unscrew the spark plug. "Our short-wave set picks up the sparkplug noise from a car, doesn't it? So why can't that man on the wharf pick us up?"

"But we don't know what wave length we'll have, or whether he'll be able to hear it at all. And we don't know code. What'll we send?"

"We know enough code to send SOS, and if they do get it back on shore, they'll have a pretty good idea where it's coming from. So get going. I think we can send a signal strong enough to reach to the wharf."

"Three dots, three dashes, three dots-that's SOS, isn't it?"

"That's it. Now stop talking and get busy." Roger pointed to the vise that was fastened to one end of the bench. "Open up the jaws. I want to clamp the magneto and the spark plug in there."

While Bill obeyed, Roger wrapped several turns of wire around the spark plug, and then he put it, together with the magneto, between the open jaws of the vise.

"Tighten it up while I hold it in place."

Roger helped with the last turn of the handle, to make sure it was tight. "Good. Now we have the outside shell of the spark plug, the case of the magneto and a wire lead all connected together. Now unroll that wire as far as she'll go. I hope it's long enough to reach through the door and out to the water. It's going to be our ground."

While Bill was stretching the wire across the floor, Roger took another length and attached one end of it to the terminal on the sparkplug. "Wait a minute," he said, as Bill neared the door. "This is our aerial. This has to go outside, too."

He moved the candle so that its light would not penetrate into the darkness outside when the door was opened. Then they stood with their ears against the door for a moment to make sure there was no one outside waiting to pounce upon them. Finally they slid back the bar, opened the door an inch, listened again, and then opened it wider. There was no sound but the wind and the swirling water around the rocks.

"Easy," Roger whispered. "Run the wire down into the water, and put a stone on it to make sure it stays there." And as Bill moved away,

Roger began to unroll his aerial, feeling overhead for places to tie it to on the underside of the dock.

Bill came back. "I'm all set. How about you?"

"This wire isn't very long." Roger sounded worried. "We really ought to have a big aerial-we'll need it."

"What about that iron rail they use to roll the motor on? It isn't grounded, is it? It's fastened to the dock, and wood's an insulator. Why can't we use that?"

"Good idea. Get the knife and I'll cut the insulation off the end of the wire and wrap it around the rail."

They skinned about three feet of the wire and made several wraps around the rail, as tightly as they could. Then they retraced their steps, being careful to tuck the wire out of sight.

"All we can do now is hope," Roger muttered. "And if- Listen I heard oars!"

"That man's coming back I Let's get inside and bar the door."

"No, wait. It might be smarter to make things look as if nothing had happened since he went away. If he finds the door locked on the inside- Come on."

Roger dashed through the door and bent over Slim, turning him to lie exactly as they had found him. Then, with Bill's help, he arranged the ropes over Slim's wrists and legs so that, from a slight distance, they looked as if they hadn't been touched. Bill moved the candle back to its original place.

"What about the magneto?" he asked. "Suppose he sees that?"

"The light doesn't reach there. If he doesn't look right at it, he won't know anything's different than it was. And now let's get out of here."

By the time they had reached a hiding place of comparative security, behind a big rock about fifteen feet from the door, the sound of the oars was very close indeed. They huddled there together as the boat bumped against the piling only a short distance away, hoping they hadn't been seen. Then they heard the sounds of the man climbing the ladder and his footsteps on the wooden dock.

"Maybe he won't even look," Bill breathed.

Roger nudged him to keep quiet. The man's shoes scraped as he climbed down underneath the pier, and his flashlight went on, its light circling the closed bar on the door. Then he shoved back the bar and flashed his light inside.

For what seemed like a year, he stood there, his back to the boys, his head half through the doorway. But he didn't actually go in at all, and finally he pulled the door to again, and locked the latch. But the boys didn't move a muscle until he had disappeared from sight on his way to the house.

"Whew!" Bill whispered then. "Another second of that and I'd have fainted. Let's get back inside."

Roger leaned over to dip his handkerchief in a pool of sea water. Maybe it would help to bring Slim to. "Look," he said slowly, "it would be good if we knew what was going to happen next. Maybe that man persuaded Clyde to come right over here, or maybe Clyde is sending for help or something. Could you slip up to the house and *try to* find out what's going on? You could try to look through that same window we were at before. I'd go, but I want to try to start sending our signal. What about it?"

Bill gulped, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the house. "Yeah. Sure," he said. "I'll go."

"Okay. Lock the door after me when I get in, so it will look all right if anybody comes snooping. And I'll lock it from the inside, too, in case anybody tries to get in. Tap an SOS on the door when you come back, so I'll know it's you."

Roger was sliding the heavy bar when Bill spoke suddenly. "Hey! What about that boat the man just used? Why can't we put Slim in it and row back to town?"

"Say!" Roger looked excited, too. "I'm not sure we could carry Slim down the ladder, but we- No, wait. We wouldn't have to. We could leave him here and just go back for help ourselves."

Hurriedly they climbed out on the dock, ran to the ladder, and Roger led the way down. But before Bill had reached the bottom rung Roger spoke.

"It's no use. That landlubber must have left the oars in the

oarlocks, because there's only one here now. And we can't row across the bay in this wind with only one." His voice sounded grim with disappointment.

"Maybe the wind would blow us there."

"Sure. And maybe it would blow us so far off course that it would take us an hour to walk to Sea view. We can't take a chance. We don't have enough time. Nope. You go ahead up to the house, like we planned, and I'll try to start sending."

When the door was doubly locked behind him, Roger ran first to where Slim lay, turned him over again, and listened once more for the heart beat. It was steady enough. He put his dampened handkerchief on Slim's forehead, and put his sweater under his head again, and then got up. There was nothing else he could do for him right now.

Then he walked over to the magneto and took hold of the gear that was fastened to the shaft. He gave it a spin, and his own heart beat faster when a spark leaped across the spark-plug points. It wasn't a very big spark, though, so he separated the points a little with his knife. This time when he twisted the gear, the spark crackled more noisily.

Quickly Roger took off his belt and wrapped it around the gear. It went around almost four times. Then, holding the end of it tightly in his hand, he pulled it with all his strength. The gear spun rapidly as the belt flew off, and the sparks leaped the gap in the plug so fast that they looked like a single flash. He wrapped his belt on the gear again, and sent another series of sparks flying, and then he repeated the performance several more times.

There. Those sparks should certainly have carried some distance. If Jenkins were listening, he might at least become curious. Now he had to do the actual signaling.

It was quiet in the shed-so quiet that Roger thought he could even hear Slim's labored breathing. He took hold of the gear and turned it around once. A single spark flashed. Good, he thought to himself. One revolution meant one spark. He waited a minute, and then he gave the gear three twists in rapid succession. The three distinct sparks which resulted would, he hoped, resemble the three dots that stood for the letter S. Then he twisted the gear another three times, but with pauses in between. That was the three dashes. And then he struck three more rapid sparks. Three dots, three dashes, three dots-SOS.

Over and over and over he sent out the series, until his wrist ached. SOS, SOS, SOS. The sparks flashed, all right, here in this cave in the rocks. But would they reach across the inlet? And would they be recognized if they did?

SOS, SOS, SOS ...

Bill lifted his head gingerly and peered through the lighted window. The two men were there, seated at the table, and they were talking. He could see their lips move. But their words came to him as only an indistinct murmur. Bill wished the window were open. He concentrated with all his mind, trying to figure out what they were saying by reading their lips. But it didn't work. He looked around carefully to see if there was a window in the same room that *was* open, but they were all shut.

He dropped back below the level of the sill to think. Somehow he had to find out what they were saying. Somehow. Even if it meant taking a chance.

He felt carefully along the bottom of the sash and discovered that the window had been pulled down a little crookedly. At one side he could get his little finger underneath it. He shoved with all his might, and the window moved slightly.

Hastily he looked inside again, but neither of the men seemed to have noticed anything. He ducked back again. Now he could get his thumb under there, and he had more strength in his thumb. He could get both his thumbs in, side by side. He pushed, and the window lifted half an inch.

Bill dropped down again, his pulses pounding. Had they heard him? No. They were still talking, and they didn't sound alarmed.

He put his ear to the crack and shut his eyes tightly, in order to give all his attention to what he heard.

"So all we have to do is wait," one of the men was saying. Bill decided he was the one who had rowed over to Smugglers Island. "Clyde was plenty sore about us knocking that guy out. He says we could have managed it without doing that. I'd like to know how."

"Didn't he tell you?"

"No. He probably doesn't know either. He was just complaining. How about some coffee? Clyde won't be here for half an hour."

One of the men got up and moved across the floor toward the window, which was neat the stove.

Bill ducked out of sight before he was out of his chair. He didn't need to wait any longer anyhow. He had the information they wanted. Half an hour. Maybe that would be time enough. Maybe. He started back to the shed under the pier, running as fast as he could in the dark.

* * *

Jenkins picked up the microphone that lay beside him on the seat of the car and spoke into it. "Nope. Nothing yet. And it's been almost two hours," he added.

"I know," a voice said from the loudspeaker on the dashboard. "Well-there's nothing to do but wait, I suppose. We'll sign off here for a while, but you stand by."

"Right." Jenkins put the microphone down and tried to settle himself more comfortably.

"Any news?" A shadowy figure had materialized outside the car.

Jenkins shook his head. "Headquarters doesn't know a thing."

A rapid series of clicks from the loudspeaker startled them.

"What was that?"

Jenkins shrugged his shoulders. "Somebody starting a car near here, I guess."

Again the sound came. Jenkins frowned. Again the loudspeaker crackled. And again and again.

"Somebody sure is having trouble with his car," the man outside muttered.

"I wish he'd get it started. If headquarters tries to reach me and that noise is-" Jenkins' voice stopped. "Wait a minute," he whispered. He leaned forward, his ear almost beside the speaker. "That sounded like an SOS," he said softly, after a moment.

"An SOS?" The other man laughed. "Ships don't use spark transmitters these days. They-" "I know. Sh-h-h."

Again the loudspeaker sent forth tiny sounds, and they were spaced in an orderly way. Crackle-crackle-crackle- very fast. And then crackle-crackle-crackle, more slowly. And then three quick ones again.

"Say, you may be right. D'you suppose some poor devil had his set smashed in a storm, or something, and-"

"I don't know, but I think we ought to try to find out. Jerry, go inside and call up the coast-guard station. Tell them to get their direction system working. Maybe we can find out where it's coming from."

"Okay."

And a few minutes later there was a hurried consultation at the land end of the pier.

"There's a phone in the packing-house office there," Uncle Willie said, "but the door's locked."

"That won't worry us. This might be an emergency."

A little persuasion was all the old wooden door needed, and within a few minutes the detective was barking at the coast guard.

"Yeah. You heard me. It's an SOS in spark. Get your equipment going and find out where it's coming from." He turned around. "One of you go check with Jenkins, and see if the signal's still coming through."

He kept the receiver to his ear, and shortly a voice spoke through it. "We've got the system on, but we haven't picked up anything yet."

"You'd better keep trying."

"Jenkins says the signals stopped for a minute, but they're on again now," the man who had gone to check with Jenkins reported.

"Haven't picked them up yet," the telephone droned.

Uncle Willie stepped forward and spoke into it a moment.

"Try from the direction of Crab Island," he said.

"Crab Island? Okay-we'll try it."

Jerry stared at Uncle Willie and then spoke again into the

telephone himself. "If that signal comes from out at sea, it's your baby, of course. But if it comes from Crab Island, we'll take care of it."

"I understand." The telephone was silent for a long moment, and the atmosphere in the little office grew tense. And then it spoke again. "We've got ill You were right-it's from Crab! I don't know what this is all about, but good luck, boys."

But the last half of his sentence went unheard. The men in the office had galvanized into action.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Roger stopped and wiped the perspiration from his face. His right hand had given out some time ago, and he was now spinning the gear with his left. Just as he was about to start again, he heard the signal tapped on the door. He ran to it and spoke against the crack.

"Bill?"

"Yeah. It's me. Hurry up."

The two bars were slid back, the door opened and Bill came in. Roger closed and bolted the door behind him. "Well?"

Bill was out of breath. "We've got about half an hour. Clyde's coming over here in half an hour."

"That's not so much, is it? But at least we know. And if they tried to break in here, that would take them a little extra time. Come on-let's get going then. You'll have to turn the magneto for a while now. My wrists are about given out."

He showed Bill how to send the sparks, and when the signals were going out again went over to look at Slim. It seemed to Roger that he stirred slightly, and that his lips moved. Roger took the damp handkerchief and mopped his face with it. Suddenly Slim's eyes opened.

"Hey-Slim's coming to," Roger said.

Bill turned toward them quickly, but Roger added, "Go on with the sparks, Bill. Slim-are you all right? It's me-us."

"What're you doing here?" Slim struggled to sit up, rubbing a hand across his eyes. "What-?" He stared, blinking, around the shadowy space.

Roger told him, as rapidly as possible, what had happened.

Slim shook his head to clear it. "I'm a fine detective, I am," he muttered. "And now I've gotten you kids into this, too. I came in that door over there, saw one man standing there by the generator-and *didn't* see the one that must have been behind the door. Well-" He shrugged. "No use wasting time over my mistakes. Let me see how you're doing this signaling business."

He struggled to his feet and walked with Roger across the room.

Bill grinned up at him. "What'll we do now?"

Slim nodded admiringly. "Just what you are doing. You're a couple of bright boys, you are. Keep up the sparks-and hope."

Roger tried to keep the pride out of his voice. "I'll take over now, Bill. You're probably getting tired."

Slim watched for a moment, nodded again, and then turned to inspect the door. "Yes, that ought to hold for a while, if they try to come in. But mind you-if we hear them outside, I want you two to hide immediately. If they get in here, it's possible they won't notice you at all. You could be under that tarpaulin back there. And I could stir up enough excitement to keep them from looking around too carefully."

"But what'll happen to you?" Bill asked.

Slim rubbed the swelling lump on his head. "Probably the same thing that happened to me before, but we Warners have solid heads. If I can decoy them away from this place, you may have a chance to crawl out and start sending again. Then-" He broke off abruptly. "Listen." He hurried toward the door and put his ear against it. "I think I hear something-a motor."

"Clyde!" Roger whispered. "Has it been half an hour since-?" But his voice dried up in his throat. He had had a mental image of genial, ruddy Mr. Clyde, looking ruddier than ever but not genial at all, and he was suddenly so frightened that he couldn't speak.

He and Bill crept close to the door, too, and listened. Yes, the

sound was unmistakable. It roared closer and then throttled down, and there were faint bumping noises as the speedboat touched the dock. All of them stood motionless. Would Clyde try to come into the shed, or would he go up to the house first?

There were footsteps on the wooden pier, and Slim's mouth tightened. He motioned toward the tarpaulin where he had told the boys to hide, but neither of them could move.

And then suddenly they could hear no more. The footsteps were not scraping over the stones, as they would be if Clyde were coming down into the shed immediately. They had simply ceased, as if Clyde had stepped onto the sandy ground beyond the dock and gone toward the house.

After another long moment Slim straightened up, slowly, and grinned.

"I guess we've got a reprieve," he said.

"Yeah. I guess so." Roger took a deep breath and pulled himself together. But they all knew it might not be for long, so he hastened back to the magneto. If they were to have only a few minutes more, they'd better use them

to advantage, keep sending their message as long as they could.

Roger's hands were shaking, but he gave the gear another turn and another and another. S...O...S... Suddenly it all seemed to him a childish and futile performance. Probably these tiny sparks weren't strong enough even to cross that narrow strip of water to the shore. Or, if they were, Jenkins was interpreting them as the noise of a stubborn car motor.

But he kept at it, three quick turns, three slow ones, three quick ones again. And then the whole thing repeated.

The minutes dragged by.

And then there was a sound directly outside the door. Slim and Bill and Roger all froze.

"Here it comes," Roger thought. "Here it comes."

"Break it in!" a voice said quite clearly.

Roger saw Slim's hand go to his pocket and then come away again, as he remembered that his gun had been taken from him.

"Come on, boys-break it in!"

Suddenly a strange expression crossed Slim's face, and he leaned forward, speaking into the crack of the door. "Who's there?"

"Slim?" the voice outside said. "You in there, Slim? We got your SOS. Can you let us in or shall we break it down? If you don't answer, we'll break in."

Roger and Bill stared at each other, incredulously. They'd done it! It had worked! Roger could feel his face twist into a grin of wild relief, and he saw the same grin mirrored on Bill's small white face.

"Okay, Red," Slim was saying quietly, but his face was grinning, too, as he pushed back the heavy inner bar.

In another moment the door was open and three men were coming in.

"What happened?" Then Jerry caught sight of the boys and he blinked. "What are you two doing here?"

"They've been saving our necks," Slim said shortly, "but the details will wait." The grin was gone now, and he was serious and intent again. "We're expecting visitors pretty soon, and you're just in time to help us entertain them. Believe me, I'm glad to see you."

"What's the lay of the land, Slim?" Three more men materialized in the doorway.

They all gathered together in a tight little knot, just inside the door. Roger was rubbing his wrists, but he was no longer actually aware of the fact that they ached.

Hastily Slim explained the situation, concluding, "So let's get outside now and bar this door. We'll be in a better position if we try to take them when they arrive, than if we let them come in here. We'll spread out out there and form a reception committee. Come on, now."

"What about them?" Jenkins indicated Roger and Bill.

Slim thought for an instant. "They'll get into your boat and stay there. If we didn't hear you coming, probably the men at the house

didn't either, so they won't be on the lookout for a boat. It's the safest place I can think of right now."

A moment later they had closed the door behind themselves and barred it, and Slim was indicating various hiding places in the neighborhood.

"And you two get into the boat and stay there, with your heads down," he finished. "Go on, now." He put his arms briefly around their shoulders.

"There's a man on guard in the boat," Jerry told them softly. "Thought I'd tell you, so we wouldn't scare you."

"Okay." The boys walked together along the dock. Behind them men were settling down for a vigil that would end in danger, but across the water the lights of Seaview were blinking as peacefully as if smugglers and guns were only things one read about in books. Now, out in the clear windy night, that dark room they had just left seemed almost a nightmare-something they had dreamed.

As they reached the ladder Roger gave one last look back over his shoulder toward the house, and just as he did so he saw the lights there go off.

Quickly he lay down on the pier and let his head drop over the edge. "Slim," he said softly.

"Yes?" Slim's voice answered from some invisible shadowy place among the rocks.

"The lights went out in the house. They must be coming."

"Okay. Get in the boat and keep your head down."

"Sure." And a moment later, as they prepared to descend the ladder, he said into the darkness below, "It's us-Roger and Bill. We're coming down."

"You two!" the guard in the boat exclaimed. But he reached up a hand to help them, and motioned them to lie flat as soon as they stepped aboard. "What are you doing here?" he muttered.

"Tell you later," Roger whispered back. "I think things are going to start happening now. Slim's okay, though. They're all together up there, waiting for them."

The boat rocked gently in the dying wind, and it was comforting to know that somebody was standing guard over you. Roger knew now that it was going to be all right. Men who could figure out what his feeble little sparks had meant, and get here silently to meet the enemy on its own ground-men like that could be trusted to handle the cleverest criminals in the world. Still, it would be good when it was all over. Roger glanced at Clyde's speedboat bobbing quietly beside them, and wondered if Mr. Clyde would ever ride in it again.

"Hey!" he whispered suddenly, to the guard up forward. "Suppose Clyde or one of the other men heads right for the speedboat, instead of going to the shed? They might get away before Slim and the others could stop them."

"I don't know yet what this is all about," the guard muttered back, "but if that's the speedboat right next to us, and you think it might be used for a getaway-well, we'll soon fix that."

He went to the side of the boat next to Clyde's craft, and groped in the darkness until he located the speedboat's mooring line. Gradually, quietly, he pulled the speedboat alongside. Bill and Roger helped keep the boats from colliding, and the man jumped into the speedboat and opened the motor compartment. He bent over it for a moment, straightened up, and stepped back into their own boat.

"There," he whispered. "They won't start that in a hurry. I took the distributor rotor."

"Sh-h-h," Bill whispered, and a moment later they could all hear approaching footsteps.

And then Clyde's voice spoke, clearly. There was a hard ring in it that sent chills down Roger's spine.

"I'll start the motor," he said. "You two go into the shed and carry him out." Clyde's brisk footsteps sounded on the resounding wood of the pier, and in another moment he was coming down the ladder.

Roger realized, with a sudden wild impulse to laugh aloud, that when Clyde had left his boat it had been at the base of the ladder. He thought he was dropping into his own boat, when really-

Clyde's foot was on next to the bottom rung when there was a sudden confusion of noise from underneath the pier. Voices rang out, a shot echoed noisily, and there was the hard sharp impact of a blow.

Clyde stopped, took one step back up the ladder, and then seemed to change his mind. With a quick turn of his heavy body, he threw himself downward.

Instantaneously the guard flashed a light into his face. Clyde blinked into it, his face a study in furious amazement. And then he turned and reached for the ladder again.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," the guard drawled. Clyde's face worked convulsively. "Who are you?"

"My name's Joe, but what difference does it make? I just work here. Put your hands out in front of you."

Clyde made a sudden motion toward his pocket.

"Oh, no, you don't." Joe didn't drawl this time. "Mine's all ready for action."

Slowly Clyde lifted his hands forward. The boat lurched as the guard moved toward him, and in the glare of the flashlight Clyde wavered, looking frightened and foolish, and his anger wasn't terrifying any more. It was like the futile anger of a bully who suddenly knows that his strength is gone, and that there is nothing behind his blustering words.

There was a click, and the flashlight gleamed on the handcuffs Joe fastened around Clyde's wrists. Then, with expert speed, Joe reached into Clyde's pocket and withdrew a pistol, slipping it into his own instead.

"And now just sit down and make yourself at home," he advised, his voice once more easygoing.

The boys had been so engrossed in the event near at hand that they had been unable to follow the sounds going on beneath the pier, up near the shed. Now, when they turned their attention in that direction, straining for some sound that would tell them how Slim and the other men were doing, they were rewarded by a brisk, "Okay. That's both of them. Shall we put 'em in the boat, Slim?"

"Just a minute." Slim's feet ran the length of the pier, and his flashlight shone down into the boat. "Oh. You did get him. Nice work." There was a triumphant grin in the voice. "All right," he called over his shoulder. "Bring them out here. Joe has Clyde, safe and sound. Good evening, Mr. Clyde," he added, more quietly. "Sorry to return

your hospitality so rudely, but business is business-or, should I say, laws are laws?"

"You-you-" Clyde glared up into the glow of the flashlight and then subsided into silence.

Bill giggled, and the big man's face suddenly contorted with a new spasm of anger.

"Is that-the Baxter boys?" he gasped.

"Yes, sir, it's us," Roger said, uncomfortably. He wondered how a man who seemed as nice as Mr. Clyde had always seemed, could ever have become involved in such a grim and dishonest business as smuggling. But there wasn't much time to wonder just then, because a procession was materializing on the pier over their heads, and a moment later Slim's voice said briskly, "All right, you two. Get down into that boat. And make it quick."

Clumsily, their wrists handcuffed, the men descended the ladder and dropped into the boat.

"Sit down up there, facing the front of the boat," Joe told them, and they obeyed, meekly, but glaring at each other.

"Okay," Slim said. "Take them over to town and let the constable lock them up for the rest of the night. And then come on back here. Roger, Bill-are you all right?"

"Sure, Slim," they said together.

"Good. I'll see you when I get in." .

"Couldn't we stay here, Slim?" Bill asked.

"You could not." There was amusement in Slim's voice. "But don't worry-I think you've seen most of the excitement. According to our friends here, there's only one other fellow with Tinkham in the boat, so the rest of the job should be fairly quiet. Look after them, Joe."

"Sure thing. Oh, by the way," Joe moved forward and reached up toward Slim who was at the head of the ladder. "Here's the distributor from the speedboat."

"Thanks. We'll go back to town in style, then, when we're ready to go."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Joe made the boys climb out of the boat first when they reached the Seaview dock, and Uncle Willie was standing on the dock to receive them.

"I knew it," he said grimly. "I knew when I heard those sparks that that sounded-like a trick you two would think up. So I went up to your house and sure enough-you weren't at home. Are you all right?"

"Sure, we're fine," Bill told him happily. "And look- we've got Mr. Clyde and two more men here, and Slim's staying on the island to get Old Man Tinkham and the other one."

"Sure, sure. But are you certain you didn't get hurt?" Uncle Willie pulled them over under the glow of the pier's light, and stared at them. "When your mother hears about this-" He groaned.

"They seem pretty well able to take care of themselves, Mr. Davis," Joe spoke up. "Don't they, Clyde?" he added with a grin, hauling the man up the last few steps of the ladder.

Clyde didn't answer, and Joe turned back to the other two men. Soon they were all on the dock.

"Honest, we're all right," Roger assured his uncle. "We're supposed to take them-" he looked over his shoulder-"to the constable's and leave them there."

" 'We' is not the correct pronoun to use in this case," Uncle Willie told him sharply. "Joe, the constable's place is four doors down to your right, at the end of the pier. I'm almost tempted to let you take these two youngsters along with you. It begins to look like keeping them under lock and key is the only safe thing to do."

But Joe only grinned at Uncle Willie and the boys, and started his little parade off up the dock.

"All right." Uncle Willie mopped his brow with a vivid bandanna. "Come on along home, now. And get into bed and stay there."

"Oh, Uncle Willie-please," Roger said. "It's almost over. Can't we

stay here until Slim brings the others in? Can't we-please?"

Uncle Willie glared down at them for a long moment before he grinned a reluctant grin.

"All right," he said. "All right. Your mother expects me to take care of you, but all I can say is-she'd better find a better man than I am for the job. It's too much for me." He put an arm around each of them and led them over to the car that was parked on the pier. "Get in here then. We might as well sit down, anyhow." His voice roughened. "That was a smart trick-sending those signals. How'd you manage it? And how'd you happen to be out on the island anyway?"

Eagerly they told him the whole story. It had been scary enough when it happened, but now they were proud about it, and it seemed a wonderfully exciting adventure in retrospect. Apparently Uncle Willie thought it was exciting, too, because he didn't interrupt once. He just sat there, shaking his head at intervals, and muttering under his breath. When they had finished, they demanded to know everything that had happened on the dock while they had been gone. Who had first heard the signals, and how did they find out where they were coming from?

Joe went past during their prolonged conversation, on his way back to Slim, but otherwise nothing happened to spoil the excitement of hearing and telling all that had occurred.

They had just wormed every detail out of Uncle Willie about the coast guard and the direction system, when Bill glanced at the dashboard clock.

"Say! It's two-thirty. Old Man Tinkham's due back now. Let's go out to the end of the dock and watch."

Uncle Willie shrugged his shoulders. "Sure. Let's," he said. "You'll see this through to the bitter end no matter what I say, so I might as well give in right away."

They looked out across the quiet inlet, almost unruffled now except for little scattered gusts of wind that seemed to be straggling along in the wake of the hard blow of earlier evening. There were lights in the Clyde house on Smugglers' Island-apparently he had left them when he departed, in order not to arouse suspicions on shore-but on Crab Island all was dark.

"Probably won't see anything anyway," Uncle Willie muttered

finally. "Sure you wouldn't like to get back in the car? It's kind of chilly out here, and when a man's been without food as long as I have, he feels the cold."

"I'm kind of hungry, too," Bill said, surprised to realize that he hadn't once thought of food during the past hours. "Maybe we could run over to the store for a minute and-No--look!"

A light winked on in the direction of Crab Island, and then another and another. Voices rang out across the water.

It was a meaningless pageant of sound and streaks of light from where they stood, and Roger could feel his heart begin to beat heavily again. Maybe, even with all his men, something might go wrong, and Slim--Then the lights concentrated in a single spot, and flickered downward into the water. The sounds had died away. It seemed to be over. Whatever had happened, had happened.

And then one of the lights flashed upward into the sky, disappeared and reappeared again. There seemed to be a kind of order in it. Roger's mind clicked to attention.

Three long flashes and then darkness. Then a long flash, a short one, and a long one again. Then the three long flashes, and--

"Okay!" Roger said suddenly. "He's signaling to us. He's sending O.K. It's all right. Hurray! Yippee!"

"Yippee!" Bill echoed, and they grabbed each other and jumped up and down in an access of relief and excitement.

"Oh, it is, is it?" Uncle Willie muttered. "Personally, I would like to be starting on a trip to the South Seas right now, far far away from the wrath of my admirable sister." But he grinned while he spoke, and he didn't sound nearly as angry as he seemed to think he did.

* * *

It was nearly three-thirty when Uncle Willie lifted the coffee pot from the stove in the Baxter kitchen, and poured cups for himself and Slim. Slim was at the stove, expertly stirring scrambled eggs, and the boys were pouring out milk for themselves and making toast. Duckfoot was hastily consuming the contents of the dish Bill had absemmind-edly filled for him, before somebody should remember that he had already been fed twice that night.

A few minutes later they all settled down around the table.

Slim took a long swallow of coffee and set his cup down with a sigh. "Umm," he murmured. "Good. Much better, in fact, than lying on a damp floor in an underground shed." He tackled his bacon and eggs. "Tomorrow," he said, between bites, "we'll take our friends into the city and charge them officially. There were two men in the boat with Tinkham-did I tell you? But they were all so surprised, it was almost no trouble at all to haul them in. And," he added, "we likewise got some twenty-four very pretty diamonds. Very pretty, indeed-and very, very valuable."

"Was that the whole gang-that we got tonight?" Roger wanted to know.

"Not quite," Slim shook his head. "We know there must be several more, on the city end of it-to take care of selling the gems. Your friend with the car, Roger, is probably one of them. But Clyde seems pretty willing to talk, so I doubt if we'll have any trouble rounding them up. Curious about Clyde, isn't it?" he mused. "He's an intelligent chap. He could have been a success at any business he tried, you'd think. How'd he get into smuggling at all, I wonder?"

But before this fascinating topic could be properly explored, there was the sound of a car motor outside. All of them looked up curiously, wondering what final detail remained to be settled that night, when everything seemed in order. Slim moved toward the door. But before he reached it, the door opened from the outside, and two figures came in.

"Mom!" Bill squeaked. "Dad!"

Both the boys leaped out of their chairs, and Bill's fell over with a great clatter.

Uncle Willie sat perfectly still, with his head in his hands.

"Boys!" Mrs. Baxter gathered them into her arms, her face white. "Are you all right? What is it? What are you doing up at this hour?"

"Sure! We're fine! We're great!" Bill shouted. He detached himself from his mother to hurl himself on his father. "Pop! How'd you get here? Boy, wait till we tell you what we've been doing! Boy! Remember you told us once how the first wireless was done with sparks? Well-" For several minutes the air was full of incoherent explanations and questions, but finally Mr. Baxter put an arm firmly

around both boys and covered their mouths with his hands.

"You're apparently both of sound body, if not of sound mind," he said. "But keep quiet a minute. Get your mother some coffee. And I wouldn't mind a cup myself while you're about it. You shouldn't do things like this to your mother, you know. Willie, can't you keep these kids in order?" And then he looked at Slim. "Are you the detective Mildred's been telling me about?"

"Detective?" Roger jerked away from his father's arm. "Mom, how'd you know that's what he was? Here, Mom-sit down. Look, how'd you know?"

When Mrs. Baxter had had a swallow of coffee, and studied the faces of her sons carefully for a long moment, she leaned back in her chair.

"I guess you are all right, after all," she murmured. "Yes, I knew. I suspected for some time, and then that day-the day you drove me down in the car to see Uncle Willie-I made him tell me. If I'd thought you'd really get involved, though, I'd have taken you to Aunt Martha's with me- or stayed at home myself. Willie, you promised me they'd be safe. You promised."

"But we are safe," Bill insisted.

"Mrs. Baxter, it's my fault," Slim began, turning away from a low conversation he had been carrying on with Mr. Baxter.

"Nonsense," the boys' father said, pushing Slim down into his chair, and dragging up a chair for himself. "From what you've just told me, it wasn't anybody's fault particularly. It was just one of those things. After all, Mildred, the boys are all right. Now let's have some coffee, and get a coherent report of what's been going on."

The boys told it, together. Their mother listened with wide eyes, and little worried puckers of her brow. But their father nodded briskly.

"So the men on the pier-Slim's men-heard our signals and came out to the island, and captured everybody," Bill concluded, with a triumphant beam a little later. "And that's all there was to it, honest, Mom."

"That's all-except that they probably saved my life," Slim added.

"You see, Mildred?" Mr. Baxter winked at the boys. "It wasn't so much. We've got a couple of heroes in the family, that's all. Smart ones, too. There is one question I wanted to ask: did you finish up that wind generator? That's one of the reasons I seized this opportunity to come home for a few days when I had a chance-I wanted to find out how you were doing with it. I knew Mildred was about ready to come home, too, so I stopped by to pick her up-and when we found we'd missed the last train, we borrowed a car. Now come on-how about the windmill?"

"Sure, it's all finished, Pop," Roger told him. "And it works fine, doesn't it, Slim?"

"It sure does. We've got a slow-speed generator on it and-"

"You should see the swell sliding contacts we rigged up, Pop," Bill cut in excitedly.

Mrs. Baxter got to her feet. "Do you realize it's half-past four?" she demanded.

"Just a moment, dear," Mr. Baxter murmured. "I want to hear about this."

Mrs. Baxter shrugged resignedly. "In that case, Willie," she said, "you and I might as well go into the living room and have that little talk I've been wanting to have with you."

"It's awfully late, Mildred," her brother said, getting hastily to his feet. "I really think I'd better get along home. We can talk tomorrow."

"We'll talk tonight," Mrs. Baxter said firmly.

Duckfoot, roused suddenly from a dream brought on by bacon at an unusual hour, and, seeing Mr. Baxter, jumped into his lap and began to lick his face with his big pink tongue.

"Get this dog something to eat. I want to talk," Mr. Baxter said. "Now-go on, Slim."

When the sky began to lighten a few minutes later everything was quiet. Uncle Willie was sitting patiently in the living room, listening to a lecture about the proper care of children. Mr. Baxter, Slim and the boys were deep in a

discussion of the wind generator. And Duckfoot, who knew that

food was the most important thing in the world, was happily engrossed in his third unexpected meal of the night. There'd been a lot of excitement lately, his gently wagging tail seemed to say; but as long as it resulted in happy events like this, who could complain? Not Duckfoot. And then he lay down beside his empty dish and went back to sleep again.

THE END

STRANGER AT THE INLET

By Martin Colt

ROGER BAXTER Mystery no. 1

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